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THE *Prayer*

OF THE

*Church*

*Universal*



MARC BOEGNER

1881-

*Translated by* HOWARD SCHOMER

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THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE



MARC BOEGNER is well known in the United States as the president of the French Protestant Federation and one of the co-presidents of the World Council of Churches. His sheer genius as a church executive and statesman of the ecumenical movement should not, however, be better known than his regular service as pastor in Paris throughout all the years of his wider ministry. To the people of the Passy district of that city this leader of the world mission of the Christian churches is first and foremost minister of the local church, to whom hundreds and hundreds of young people and adults owe their grounding in the Christian faith.

Each springtime for twenty-one years the people of the Passy church and a far larger circle of radio listeners have looked forward to Marc Boegner's Lenten sermons. Broadcast on six successive Friday evenings as a public service by the government radio network, these sermons have been a rallying point for Protestants

throughout the French-speaking world, of whom there are close to a million and a half. But such great preaching of essential Christianity has not failed to reach a far broader group of listeners, especially as European Christians have boldly set out to turn the tide of that dechristianization which has over the last century reduced all branches of the Church in the Old World to the hard but invigorating status of minority groups. The present series of meditations has been inspired by the deep conviction that the Lord's Prayer is the great tie that binds, the *Prayer of the Church Universal*.

Here then is an authentic voice raised from the hard-pressed ranks of European Christianity, a representative spokesman revealing what the Spirit has been saying to Christians in Europe in these last strenuous years on one of the central themes of the faith. But, beyond all such international or ecclesiastical considerations, here is a wonderful book of personal devotions, in language which ministers and laymen alike will love.

The reader who has said the Lord's Prayer too often and too easily to mean it will find, through these pages, the power at long last to *pray* the great prayer. And the reader who has drifted into a prayerless and, perhaps, dreamless existence will be aided through these pages to come back to himself and his God.

HOWARD SCHOMER

*Le Chambon-sur-Lignon*  
*France*



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## *The Lord's Prayer*

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
    On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our debts,  
    As we forgive our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation,  
    But deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory, forever. Amen.*

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Our Father Who Art in Heaven*

MATTHEW 6:9

THE PRAYER of the Church Universal! Who could think of refusing this title to the Lord's Prayer?

Every day, from one end of the earth to the other, the Lord's Prayer is read or prayed in more than eleven hundred languages by Christians of every denomination. We know that since March, 1950, according to an instruction issued by the Holy Office concerning the ecumenical movement, it is no longer forbidden to Roman Catholics to recite the Lord's Prayer with members of other Christian confessions—and why should I leave unsaid the joy which we Protestants have felt, quite as much for our Catholic brothers as for ourselves, in hearing of this permission now granted them?

The truly ecumenical character of the Lord's Prayer does not, however, depend upon the decision of the

Holy Office in Rome. It owes its universal quality to the fact that Christ himself taught it to his disciples. As he gathered his followers about him to hear the Sermon on the Mount, he gave them instructions concerning prayer and other problems of the spiritual life, instructions from which the Church, his Church, has not ceased to derive its nourishment through the centuries.

These disciples who surround him there, a little withdrawn from the nearby crowd, already form the Church, the assembly of those whom the Holy Spirit is leading to God through the good news which Jesus is announcing to them. They foreshadow, long before the first Pentecost, the Church of all the ages, with its weaknesses, its divisions, its errors, and its faults, but also with its love for its Lord, through whom all his disciples, to whatever Christian communion they belong, glimpse the mystery of their essential unity.

The Lord's Prayer is the prayer of all and of each one. What child, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, has not learned it from his mother? In what sanctuary do Christians gather without being led through the corporate worship of their church to pray it together? And among the innumerable faithful who have recited or who recite, "Our Father who art in heaven," is there even one who has ever felt that he could not make the prayer taught by Jesus his very own?

There is, indeed, nothing which can turn anyone away from praying the Lord's Prayer. Nothing—unless it be all that the prayer bears in itself of re-



quirements, all the religious and social commitments which it implies for him who takes it seriously; nothing—other than that which we shall meditate upon together in these chapters.

But this last is another matter, which in no way limits the universality of the Lord's Prayer. He taught it to his disciples, commanding them to receive it as the model of their prayer and, if I may say so, the "mold" into which their prayer ought to be poured. "Never will man pray as he ought," Calvin has written, "unless the heavenly Master will guide both his mouth and his heart. The Master has commanded us to pray well, not simply with regard to words, but with regard to the things themselves and to the substance of prayer."

"Pray then like this," said Jesus to his disciples. What disciple, sensing or knowing the difficulties prayer presents, would not have heard this exhortation with gratitude and joy, hardly suspecting, however, what marvelous and formidable adventures Christians are called to live through when, in praying the Lord's Prayer, they hearken to the full depth of meaning in its words? The "Our Father" of our liturgies, of our family worship, of our personal devotions, is the prayer of the Church Universal because Christ commanded his disciples to pray it.

But, as a matter of fact, do not the Gospels give us two different forms of the prayer of our Lord, situating them in different circumstances of Jesus' ministry? Compare Matthew 6 and Luke 11: You will find between the two texts shades of difference in mean-

ing of which I do not wish to ignore the importance, even though it is not my intention to examine these differences with great care. In different circumstances why might not the Master have returned to this or that part of his teaching, modifying it as he wished?

Let us thank God that we do have slightly different texts for the Lord's Prayer and for the institution of the Lord's Supper! They forestall our temptation to give to words a magical value, and they compel us to make the effort to pass through words to the very thought which the words would express. They forewarn us against the danger of lowering the prayer taught by Christ to the role of mere "vain repetition." But, alas, how can we help but confess at the outset and before God that the recitation of the brief and holy prayer, itself given by Jesus as a remedy for the "vain repetitions" which he observed all around him to be the habit of the pagan world, has in the worship of our churches too often become a mere formality, in which neither the heart nor the will really takes part? Each one of us has reason to be ashamed of the many times he has heard the "Our Father" without *praying* it, has recited it with his mouth even as his mind has roved far away.

Such a frightful degradation of the great prayer of the Master is an evidence even in the Church of Christ of the depth of our common human tragedy! But we do not have the right simply to accept our share of responsibility and continue on in the same way. We must find out if, in the commandment of Jesus Christ to his disciples to pray in the manner of

this prayer, there is not for each of them a special intention for his personal life, even as for all of them in the life of the Church. We must discover if there is a meaning of which we must take account if we would not be guilty of unfaithfulness toward him whom we confess to be our Lord. Why did he teach us this prayer? Why precisely this prayer and not another?

The answer is given to us in the prayer itself. For that which it brings to him who prays it is the revelation of the Christian life, with its most holy demands, with its most magnificent promises. I am certain that from this very day, in meditating on the invocation, "Our Father who art in heaven," we shall see that these words lead us in a direction which our merely traditional piety or our spiritual egoism often hesitates to follow. May God help us not to refuse to walk in the indicated way!

Do I need to add, brethren, before approaching our text, that I shall not bring to you a general doctrine of prayer? That all prayer places us before fundamental problems, that it runs into various obstacles which some people regard as insurmountable, that even in the life of the believer it raises numerous difficulties, that prayer merges sometimes with many miserable human impulses and often falls vacuously to earth, I dare say I know as well as you, and no doubt better than many among you! It does not, however, enter into my plan to stop before these problems, these obstacles, these difficulties. Inevitably we shall touch one or another of them in meditating on

the Lord's Prayer, but it is this prayer that we want to try to listen to, to reflect upon, to pray together, in order to be led by it where God awaits us.

One further word. At the moment when I began to prepare these meditations, I was not aware of the admirable study entitled *Prayer*, which the great theologian Karl Barth had just devoted to the Lord's Prayer. No doubt if I had read this study at that time, I should have abandoned my plan. Coming upon it later, it seemed to me that I ought to persevere in my first intention, for my purpose is rather different from Karl Barth's. Moreover, even if I tell you that you must read Karl Barth's work (and you should read it, for you will draw from it an immense enrichment), you will not all do so; I shall try therefore to make you benefit from it when his path and my own cross.

Behold us, therefore, now arrived at the threshold of the Lord's Prayer. It is a great and fearful privilege to meditate upon it together. Oh, ask of him that he grant us the grace that our common meditation may be an act of intercession! By this I mean: Let our study be an offering of ourselves to him who has given us this prayer in order that, every time that we so pray, a spiritual event shall take place, restoring the consciousness of our true vocation as Christian men and women.



"Our Father who art in heaven."

When we pronounce this invocation, we call upon someone. Who is he? He is, naturally, the one whom



the whole Church confesses to be the God of revelation. "Not the God of the philosophers," said Pascal, "but the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ!" When we open our mouths to pray the Lord's Prayer, as indeed when we pray any prayer, we perform an action—perhaps without knowing it—by which we wrest ourselves at least momentarily from the weight of the solitude caused by our unbelief, our materialism, and all the paganism in which we daily move. By the act of prayer we decide for God against atheism, for God against every idolatry and first and foremost against the idolatry of ourselves, for God against every philosophy which pretends to imprison us in the visible world. We affirm the reality of Another, of him who can never be confused with men, who has nothing in common with the concepts, however beautiful they may be, of a spiritualism or a pantheism, precisely because he is the Father who is in heaven.

We are of the earth. We live on the earth. Some coming day perhaps our friends will attend our interment in this same earth! And yet, from the moment that we say the first words of the Lord's Prayer, we find ourselves before another world than the world of this earth; the world which, in the Gospels, Jesus calls *heaven* or *the heavens*.

Let us not permit our minds to be troubled, brethren, by the conceptions of ancient cosmography which inevitably leave their trace in the language of the Gospels. That which is here affirmed is the radical difference between our world and that where God

lives. The earth is the world of sin, of suffering, of death; the heavens are the realm of glory where shine the truth and the holiness of him who is eternal.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

To say that the God to whom we pray is *in heaven* is to declare that between him and us the distance is infinite, that no human word can express his incommensurability, his transcendence, nor the perfection of his being, of which Moses received the revelation when to his anguished question, God in the burning bush responded: "I am who I am."

It is to this God that Christ asks his disciples to pray, when he puts in their hearts and on their lips the words: "Our Father who art in heaven." We cannot say them—I mean say them seriously—without making a declaration of faith which is a challenge launched at all that an immense number of our contemporaries think and, let us confess it, that we ourselves think and do during the largest part of our days.

Let us not count words for deeds. Is not our Christian faith too often a Sunday faith, a faith of the day or the hour in which we participate in the worship of our church, a faith for the few minutes in the morning or the evening when we open our Bible? And if our faith joins battle with our unbelief, is it not conquered by the latter from the moment that we plunge again into the worries of our daily

existence, that we find ourselves at grips again with our cares and our trials, feeling all around us the mortal perils which cause so many millions of men to tremble with fear? Our businesses, our professional tasks, our financial needs, the future of our children—these are the things which preoccupy us, which weigh heavily upon us and too often veritably crush us from the first hour of the morning. These are things of the earth, and what can a God who is in heaven, a distant God, so far away from the earth that he is inaccessible, have to do with all these things? Humanity, the society of which we are a part and which models us after its own image, the state with its growing demands, the things which are useful or harmful to our daily life, have nothing to do with heaven nor with the God of heaven. All these things are there, very close; they take possession of us; they absorb our thoughts, our energies. How can we raise ourselves above all these things clear up to this God to whom, if we wish to be altogether sincere, we ought to address but one sole prayer, the most moving prayer perhaps in all the gospel: "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Yet Christ said to his disciples: "Pray then like this: *Our Father who art in heaven. . .*" And we who profess to be Christians want to obey him. We *pray* as he commanded us to do, and by this fact alone we stand up against ourselves and against the materialism of our daily life. Through the wilderness of our all too real unbelief our poor words seek to clear a trail toward the God to whom we wish to pray.

Ah! how often our words come to a halt before the first obstacle, exhausted by their effort! We say them nevertheless; we repeat them; we do not admit that we could possibly find ourselves unable ever again to pray, *Our Father who art in heaven!* These words constitute a call, sometimes mechanical, but in many other hours of our life how fervent, murmured with gratitude, with love, with adoration, and then again mingled with that self-concern which holds us so far, so very far from what Christ calls heaven! In what strange fashions we sometimes address to God this appeal which opens the Lord's Prayer!

And yet! When we put into this call our heart's whole sincerity and our will's determination to come close to God, we do escape the enslaving hold of our self-centered idolatry, the tyranny of things visible, the domination of sin; and the invocation which Jesus himself puts on our lips proclaims, in the middle of a world so largely dechristianized, that the God of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the heavens and of the earth, is always and in spite of everything the God of our faith and of our hope!

## ❧ II ❧

"Christ wants us to give that name to this God which he himself employs: He exhorts us to call him Father."

Presently we will consider the first word of the invocation—*our*—and we will have no trouble, I am sure, in discovering that this word alone suffices to reveal to us an essential aspect of our Christian life. For the moment, it is the name of *Father* which



must receive our attention. Can we grasp the spirit in which Jesus pronounced it?

I have not forgotten that we find this word already in the Old Testament. However, with some rare exceptions, God appears there rather as the Father of the people he has chosen and with whom he has made an alliance. "I am a father to Israel," said Jeremiah, and it is the entire people that cries out in its prayer: "Thou art our Father." On the other hand, when in the eighty-ninth psalm we hear God say to his servant David, "He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father,'" the context indicates clearly that he who so invokes God is the "first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth," whose throne will endure "as the days of the heavens"; that is to say, the son of David of whom the prophets often speak, and whom the Church calls Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Let us open the Gospels and listen to Christ when he speaks of his Father. He was hardly twelve years of age when to his parents, who had been seeking him with anxiety and who had just found him again in the Temple, he said, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Later, in the midst of his public ministry, he never grew tired of speaking to his disciples of his Father: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father." "My Father is working still, and I am working." He called God "his Father," observes the Gospel of John, and it was because of this that his enemies sought to put him to death. With what emotion his most intimate dis-

ciples must have heard him pray to his Father: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!" and those last words which so many Christians have offered to God in the hour of their death: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!"

Does not that which we term our communion with God appear superficial and at best fleeting, beside this constant intimacy, entirely permeated with tenderness, which we glimpse in the words of Jesus? And yet we *must* pray thus: "Our Father. . . ." But the depths of this paternity are revealed to us only in Christ. "No one knows the Father except the Son," he has himself declared, "and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Is it possible, however, to know the Father without becoming his Son, without being his Son? Jesus Christ is the unique Son; the Gospel and apostolic testimony affirm this, and all Christians repeat with adoration the words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." Our sonship with regard to God can therefore be only by way of adoption. Paul, who did not hesitate to write that all those who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God, immediately added: "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." "No one comes to the Father, but by me," Christ has also stated, and it is because he—by his example, by his words, by what he does, and still more by what he is—brings us toward his father in order that we might henceforth become his children, that he commands us to pray: "*Our Father.*"

"We must indeed tell ourselves," Karl Barth has very properly remarked, "that we have no right to call God Father. This liberty is given to us, it does not come from us, it is not natural, it is the liberty of the children of God." And we must make use of this liberty because Jesus Christ, to whom we are responsible, has commanded us so to do.

It is worth the trouble to stop here an instant in order to make sure that none of these fundamental points escapes us.

When Jesus says, "My Father," we sense a love which no human accent could express. In the parable of the lord of the vineyard it permits us to observe the inner struggles of that landlord whose servants had, one after the other, been mistreated or killed. Hear the special tone with which Jesus has him say: "What shall I do? I will send my beloved Son; it may be they will respect him." Marvelous communion of love between the Father and the Son! Is it not a blasphemy to pretend to share even in a small part such a communion? And yet, if the Son invites us to pray, "*Our Father*," even much more if he commands us so to do, is it not because he knows that his Father loves us, whom the Son has led to the Father, that he loves us as his children, and that he hopes for, that he expects, that he desires our love? "It would be mad arrogance, even outrageous folly," wrote Calvin, "to claim God as Father, were it not that being grafted into the body of Christ we are acknowledged by Him to be His children." The Reformer is right: We can give to God the name of Father only because, having heard the

call of Christ, we have entered into the assembly of his disciples, which is the Church.

In spite of our great spiritual poverty, can we, when we draw close to God in prayer, calling him Father, endeavor to hear the promises contained in this very name? We are caught in the machinery of our hard and distraught existence, and we sometimes ask ourselves if the wheels are not going to crush us. To stop the machinery simply does not come into question. While it carries us along in its course, we feel weighing heavily upon us the determinism of heredity, the pressure of our social group, of its prejudices and its falsehoods. We feel ourselves imprisoned in the realm of the visible, we struggle with every kind of worry and care, and we are obsessed by temptations and lacerating sufferings which leave us no rest. Yet we profess to be Christians; we wish, in spite of everything, to remain Christians.

It is therefore upon the order of Christ himself that we fold our hands in prayer and say: "*Our Father who art in heaven*"—Ah! how beautiful is the promise that the love with which he loves his Son is also for us! What a glorious promise, that the love with which he has loved the world, since he has given to it his only begotten Son, is not an abstract, theoretical love, proclaimed from heaven above, from far away to this monstrous and anonymous mass which is the world, but that it is a personal love, which comes down to us, to each one of us! We are loved just as we are, in our poverty or in our wealth, in our mournful solitude or in the joy of our family circle, in our struggle against



doubt and unbelief or in our faith's supreme fight against the powers of sin. His love is a love which is very close to us, to which we would not be ashamed to reveal both the petty and the great trials which are ours, or all the stains with which our past has marked our lives; for his love is generous, and its intention is to make us capable of loving him who has first loved us. We, then, who hardly know how to love anything other than ourselves, find our poor stammerings are impotent to sing the joy and the power and the hope borne in the promise of God's love which these simple words of Jesus contain: "*Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven.*"

Yes, God the Creator of the heavens and the earth towers infinitely above his creatures. Although we know ourselves but little, we can only say to God with Job:

What is man, that thou dost make so much of him,  
and that thou dost set thy mind upon him?

And does not the psalmist express the real truth about our existence when he cries:

Man is like a breath,  
his days are like a passing shadow.

But no! This is not the real truth, this is not the whole truth about our existence! For in giving us the liberty, in commanding us to say to God, "Our Father," Christ reveals to us that this "breath" that

we are is loved with a love by which alone our existence receives the revelation of its origin and its end, with a love strong enough to permeate this "breath" with eternity.

### ✻ III ✻

"Our Father"—Why this *our*? And in the three petitions relative to our personal life, why this *us*: Give *us*, forgive *us*, deliver *us*? Why not the *I*, and the *me*, and the *my* found in so many other prayers—in those prayers of the psalmist, for example, which shake us to the very depths of our being?

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,  
my soul thirsts for thee;

Even though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil;  
for thou art with me.

Is not this the language of true prayer for the believer who brings to his God his repentance or his anguish, his faith or his doubt, his thanksgiving or his joy? Can there be efficacious prayer other than in a personal tête-à-tête, if I may dare to put it so, between God and the individual human being?

Here we are touching one of the most profound reasons why Christ taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer, and not some other prayer, and especially not such a prayer as those which we offer to

God most of the time, in which we speak to him constantly and always about our personal life, about the intimate circle of our kin and friends, about those whom we love, about our own cares, our own trials, our needs, thereby giving evidence of a Christian life which is hardly even conscious of the place which pride and spiritual egoism hold in it!

It is against this tendency that Christ would warn his disciples. It is from self-seeking carried even into prayer that he would wrest them free. The whole gospel bears witness that he does not permit one to become his disciple for one's own sake alone, or in order selfishly to enjoy the new life which he evokes, to hold oneself apart from those who do not know him or do not believe in him, or, all the more evidently, to stand aloof from other followers. "Christ Jesus, . . . though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." How could he therefore find it acceptable that his disciple derive special advantage or cause for vanity from the fact that he has been sought for, found, saved, by the Redeemer? One cannot be Christian through oneself alone and for oneself alone. This is the realization which comes to us every time that we recite the Lord's Prayer, saying these two words: *Our Father*. However solitary we may be when we pray these words far from any contact with a church and with church people, isolated in a sickroom or in a prison cell, we cannot pray this prayer alone. Even in the secret of our room, where Jesus desires that we enter to pray to the Father,

we are not alone, for by the very commandment of Christ we cannot and must not pray this prayer except in knowing ourselves to be, and desiring ourselves to be, members of the community of his disciples, members with others and like others of his Body, which is the Church. They are there, these other disciples of our Master and Lord; they are present in this mere word *our*, which our lips murmur; they are present by the will of Christ. It is necessary that they be present also through our love.

To say "*Our Father*" is therefore to refuse to be alone before God. It is to take sides against our own selfish and vain individualism; it is to pray in the Church, in communion with the Church; it is to accept responsibility in the presence of our Father for the brethren for whom Christ died even as he did for us ourselves, whom God loves with the same love with which he loves us, and whom he wishes to make us love as we love him.

Who are they, all these disciples to whom we must unite ourselves in the Lord's Prayer? The faithful members of the particular congregation of which we are a part, small country church or great city church? Yes, certainly! What riches come into the life of a local church when in the school of the Lord's Prayer, Christians learn to intercede for one another, or even more to recognize that they are members one of another and, in saying "*Our Father*," learn to strengthen day after day the ties of faith, hope, and charity which unite them one to another!

Let us be conscious, however, that in stopping at



the boundaries of our local church or even at those of the national or international church group which it represents, our prayer risks being perverted by a local or denominational egoism, or perhaps by some sort of ecclesiastical pride. The prayer of the Church Universal must be prayed in the communion of the Church Universal and for the Church Universal.

As we offer our prayer to God, we must embrace in it our Christian brothers who pray, but also those who, tired, discouraged, or vanquished by doubt, no longer have the strength to pray. "When Christians pray," writes Barth, "they are, so to say, the substitutes of all those who do not pray; and in this sense, they are in communion with the latter in the same way that Jesus Christ identified himself with sinful man, with lost humanity." While Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray, he saw the crowd gathering to hear him. In the *our* and in the *we*, the crowd had its place also. If the prayer of our Lord is the prayer of the Church, of the Church which evangelizes, which carries the good news to all nations, the multitudes whom the Church summons are likewise present in the *Our Father* of the Christian community.

In truth, we are all far from meeting the holy requirement which these two words lay upon our faith and our love. And yet, how could we refuse to recognize that no division, even when founded in obedience; no wall, even one raised high by the doctrinal beliefs of one group or another; and so all the more evidently, no distinction of nation, party, or race can

prevail against the essential unity of the Church affirmed in the words *Our Father*?

In every Christian denomination, even in those we esteem to be unfaithful to the truth of Christ which our church has received in trust, we know that, by the grace of God, there are children of light who hunger and thirst after holiness, after consecration to Jesus Christ, after that love which reaches out not only to his disciples but to all mankind. Whether they have been seized by his grace and born to a Christian life in a Protestant church, in an Orthodox church, or in the Roman church, they are all equally present in the priestly intercession of our Lord: "That they may be one even as we are one." And it is to them all that we want to unite ourselves when we pray: "*Our Father who art in heaven.*"

This *our* and this *we* of the Lord's Prayer not only liberate us from our religious egoism, but also from the spiritual isolation which is for so many of Christ's disciples a painful trial. There are those who suffer cruelly from lack of visible fellowship with Christians who live by the same faith. Take courage, my brothers and my sisters: Christ has given you *his* prayer in order that in it and through it you might be indissolubly attached to the great fraternity of his disciples, to all those who without knowing you hold you close in their thought and in their tenderest feelings when they pray "*Our Father*," as you will learn to hold them present in your prayer when, in obedience to Jesus Christ, you pray the same words.

"I believe in . . . the communion of saints," we

affirm in the Apostles' Creed. This communion of all those who, on earth and in heaven, are members of God's Church, is nowhere affirmed with greater force and beauty than in the invocation upon which we have meditated: "Our Father who art in heaven."

Thus the Lord's Prayer must appear to us, to make use of a title by Péguy, like *the threshold of a mystery*, of the mystery of the Christian life desired for us by him whose lordship over it we recognize. For it is a great mystery, this life to which we are born by the grace which has come with the truth in Jesus Christ. It is so personal a life that only through it do we feel that we really become persons; it is a life which takes root and grows in us only if we want to live it with and for others. It is indeed a mystery, this Christian life, which, as Calvin has shown with singular force, can be lived only in the Church, nourished by the Word of God and the sacraments. These two words so often repeated, *Our Father*, introduce us into the presence of this mystery; they already bear the mystery in themselves. Through them we penetrate that holy way where we will be led by one after another of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. It has been necessary to meditate upon the words of the invocation, it has been necessary to listen to this *Our Father* at great length, in order to be prepared to hear and to pray, with understanding of what God gives us and requires of us in the first request of the prayer: *Hallowed be thy name.*

*Amen.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Hallowed Be Thy Name*

MATTHEW 6:9

WHAT a strange prayer indeed is this prayer of our Lord! After having invoked God as our Father, it would seem normal to us to lay before him immediately our needs; and by this I mean the needs of our brethren as well as our own, just as children freely say to their father the thing which is most on their minds. But no, Christ does not give us this liberty. What he commands us to do is to turn away from ourselves in order to think first of all about the great concerns of God.

There is a remarkable likeness among the Lord's Prayer, the Decalogue, and the Summary of the Law. One might say of these three scripture passages, which are common to the worship life of all denominations, that they present two different faces, one turned toward God, the other toward men. The indissoluble union of the religious life and the moral life is thus affirmed



in them with unparalleled power. The attitude of man toward man depends upon his attitude toward God. And God, as is proper, occupies in these texts the first place. In fact, in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, there is no question of any other than he. Christ invites his disciples to forget themselves at the outset in order to think only of God.

Do you remember your prayer of this morning or last evening? Even if you were not yourself the explicit center of it, did it not bear above all else on those things which concern, touch, make sad or hopeful, those closest to you, and you yourself? Ah! these prayers in which, without being conscious of it, we turn around and around ourselves, and, even through our intercession for others, are almost always carried back to concern for ourselves!

The Lord's Prayer leads us out on an altogether different path: Before bringing to God our needs, our transgressions, our struggles, we must speak with him about *himself*.

"Is it then necessary," you will ask, "that we tell God what he knows infinitely better than we do?" But why should it be more necessary that we expound before him our own needs? Did not Christ say to his disciples at the very moment when he was teaching them his prayer: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"? We ourselves, however, do not know these things, or we are ill acquainted with them, and it is in order that we acquire a more precise, and perhaps more painful, knowledge of them that we must thus pray.

Christ intends that his disciples place the cause of their Father who is in heaven before their own. Karl Barth remarks that not only "are we permitted, but we are even ordered, to interest ourselves in God's cause." Therefore when we pray,

Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven,

we set ourselves on God's side, nothing less than that. God "invites us to associate ourselves with his plan and his action." At the same time, he makes us understand that "our cause is included in his." God does not want to pursue, apart from men, the accomplishment of his plan with regard to the world. Might I dare to affirm that he wants men to be in solidarity with him in the execution of his plans? Let us therefore say with Karl Barth that "in the Christian sense there is no God without men." And men, learning through the Lord's Prayer the secret of true prayer, enter into this solidarity, no longer looking toward God as to one who has no other mission than to grant their requests, but rather accepting, desiring that he be the first and foremost, not only in their prayers, but in their lives.



"Hallowed be thy name!"

Once again, what a strange prayer this is! Do not these words amount to asking God to watch over his

honor, in order that there might be nowhere the slightest doubt concerning *who* he is and what he does?

Unless we repeat these words automatically, we cannot fail to ask ourselves what is their precise meaning. What is this *name* which must be hallowed? Religious people who use, and sometimes abuse, traditional language are not aware that few people around them understand the formulas which they employ, even if it be supposed that they themselves always understand them. What then does this word signify which is met so many times in the Bible and of which our services make such frequent use, even where it is only as the opening phrase of the service when he who presides says, "*In the name* of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"?

For the Hebrew mind the *name* evokes a notion almost identical with that of the *person*. Already for uncivilized man there was "an intimate relationship between the name and the thing named: the name discloses the thing" or the most striking characteristics of the personality. In the Old Testament the name of God reveals what he is. This name, you will remember, he reveals to Moses in answer to the latter's question: "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" Then God said to Moses: "I am who I am." The name which God thus gives himself is contained in the language of the Old Testament in four consonants which are called the sacred tetragram.

The question of their pronunciation has been debated for a long time. French Bibles avoid the difficulty by translating the letters "the *Eternal*." Some of the old French hymns say, as does Luther's Bible, "*Jehovah*." Most Hebrew scholars say "*Yahweh*." Indeed, out of respect for the divine transcendence, the Jews had more and more restricted the use of the most excellent name for God, substituting for it little by little other names regarded as equivalents.

For the contemporaries of Jesus, brought up on the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, the name of God thus expresses that God is *Being*. Yahweh is he who is by himself, having, as the metaphysicians say, the privilege of aseity. Let us not pretend that, at the time of Moses, this essential attribute of the divine person was already clearly grasped. Nevertheless, it is inscribed in the name which God here takes in this passage *to reveal himself*.

The whole of the revelation which God is making of himself in that heart-rending educational effort which, through so many centuries, he has pursued among the people whom he wants to make his people is simply the growing explanation of what, from the beginning, has been contained in the name "*Yahweh*." It is because God has made known to his people his name that they have been able to enter into relations with him and confess him, in their monotheistic faith, as not only the unique and all-powerful God, Creator of heaven and of earth, he who is and by whom all things exist, but also as the Holy God, righteous and full of mercy.



Therefore God never tires of recalling to his people the meaning which they should attach to his name:

I am the Lord your God  
from the land of Egypt;  
you know no God but me,  
and besides me there is no savior.

And you know well the third commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

But is it of this name, of this name alone, that the first petition of the Lord's Prayer speaks? It seems so when one hears a Jewish prayer to which it is impossible not to compare the opening words of the Lord's Prayer: "Let thy great name be glorified and hallowed in the midst of the world that it has created according to thy will." And yet I cannot help believing that in teaching his disciples to pray that the name of God be hallowed, Jesus was thinking also, and perhaps above all else, of the name which he had just invited them to give to God: "Our Father who art in heaven." The transcendence, the absoluteness of the divine Being are affirmed here, but also his love for his creatures, his tenderness toward men to whom he gives himself in giving them Jesus Christ. The words by which the priestly prayer terminates, as the Gospel of John preserves it for us, confirm this interpretation: "I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

## ✻ II ✻

The word "hallow" is found frequently in the Old Testament. *To hallow* is to render holy; and as the term "holy" implies in the Bible first and foremost the notion of *set apart*, of *separated*, to hallow signifies to set apart, to separate a thing or a person from sin by consecrating it to God. Moreover, it seems that all that which is put into relationship with the Lord participates mysteriously in his holiness and is thereby hallowed or sanctified.

But how is it possible to sanctify the name of the holy God? One can do this in two ways—first in acknowledging the holiness of the revelation which this name expresses, and then in manifesting it in the world.

But in order to acknowledge it, it is first necessary to know it! The prayer which we are meditating, notes Karl Barth, "implies that the name of God is known to him who prays. One does not pray for something with which one is not acquainted." Are we acquainted with the revelations which God has given us of himself?

The churches which grew out of the Reformation have, from the very beginning, put the Bible, where God lets us listen to his Word, at the base of their confessions of faith and at the center of their services of worship. The translation and the dissemination of the Bible, in the largest possible number of languages and dialects, has been and remains one of their greatest enterprises. All Protestant religious instruction is

essentially biblical. It would seem, therefore, that the members of our churches ought to have a sufficient knowledge of the revelation which is the subject of the very first words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son."

Alas! If our churches, by the grace of God, still count among their members Christians of whom one can say that they are men and women of the Bible, who read and meditate upon the Word, each day finding nourishment in it for their thought and their prayer, deriving from the Scriptures a knowledge constantly more complete of the revelation which God gives us there concerning his nature and his plan, how much uncertainty, vagueness, fogginess, and, to tell the whole truth, ignorance are observed among the larger part of our number! Will the members of the churches of the Bible take their turn in no longer knowing the Bible and perhaps someday find the Scriptures better known to Roman Catholics than to themselves? For the Roman church, at least in countries like France, is striving to make the Bible more and more accessible and familiar.

I am not unaware of the interesting and valuable efforts of responsible organizations among our own churches or of private labors dedicated to the finding of a remedy for this disquieting situation. There is in this matter, however, a serious question which the Protestant churches must put in the forefront of their concerns. How will the name of God be hallowed—

that is to say, how will his revelation manifest its holiness in the Church and in the world to which the Church owes a witness—if our churches do not find once again the secret of a biblical education? And, I add, such a biblical education as will lead them to know the God of the Bible, “God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, God of Jesus Christ,” and to want to make him known to those who have only heard him spoken of in an irksome manner or have always been completely ignorant of him.

The responsibility of all the Christian churches in this matter is really fearful. “Hallowed be thy name,” they pray in every one of their worship services. Do they not perceive that their prayer returns upon them as a requirement from which they cannot themselves escape? It is they themselves who *must* hallow the name of God, who *must* bear witness to the sanctity of him whose revelation is confided to them as the most sacred trust. The churches in the diversity of their denominations, the Church of Jesus Christ in its entirety, have the vocation of proclaiming the sanctity of God, not only in creeds or declarations of faith but by actions in our dechristianized world.

The years which preceded the last war have shown us what can be the witness of a church before the rolling wave of an anti-Christian neopaganism when that church confesses its faith through suffering and refuses the equivocations and compromises which God’s holiness condemns. During the war other churches, confessing churches likewise, hallowed the name of God in the midst of their peoples by having



the simple but difficult courage to say *no* to temporal powers which attempted to win them over to their views. Not to protest at that time against the persecutions of non-Aryans, Christians or not, just as today not to raise a voice against injustice in all its forms, would have been or would be, on the part of churches which ask that the name of the Lord be hallowed, the sign of their own condemnation. For there is for the churches a fearful danger in praying the Lord's Prayer and yet giving the impression that they hesitate between the white man and the black man, between the light and the darkness, between the yea and the nay. There is danger in seeking to avoid provoking any possible public disapproval and to stand in well with the powerful ones of the day, and therefore, by policy or through cowardice, remaining silent, for example, in the face of the frightful ravages which alcohol is once again causing in France, in the face of the tax evasion of which a too great number of our privileged citizens are guilty, and even more in the face of a social situation which leaves in misery and anxiety for the morrow workingmen who do not receive the minimum wage necessary for existence.

Not in remaining silent about iniquity or public immorality will the churches acquire greater firmness in the profession and therefore the sanctification of the name of God in the face of contemporary atheism. It is in deliberately making heard the demands of the Word of God, its warnings and its promises, that they will attain this firmness. Furthermore, it is necessary that the divine fatherhood, affirmed in the prayer

of the Church, be manifested in its life, by the radiant influence of brotherly fellowships where the great commandment of love is not a dead letter but the constant inspiration of intercession and action. It is only then that, when the churches speak, men who do not share their faith or who even combat it will perhaps take the time to listen to Christians who live their prayer and are not content merely to speak it.

Theology has, most certainly, a mission of capital importance to accomplish. It is its responsibility to sound the depths of the revelation which the Bible gives us of the name of God and to elaborate the doctrine of God—*theology* in the proper sense of the term—called to take its part in the work of confessing the faith. There is no Christian ethic, and the holiness of God cannot be manifested in the collective life of the Church, if theology does not work unceasingly to give to the Church the knowledge of God which the Holy Spirit causes to spring forth from the inward parts of the revelation. But neither is there a theology faithful to its proper mission which does not tend always to incarnate itself in the obedience of the Church, and which does not inspire above all else worship, love, and intercession in the Church.

That the Church has the responsibility as well as the glory of hallowing the name of God does not signify that this name, thrice holy, must be carefully held apart from all life which is not, strictly speaking, the *life of worship*. The divine revelation of which the Church has received the trust, not to keep it unto itself alone but to proclaim it to the world, would

have everything to lose by being thus imprisoned in sanctuaries and sacristies, in councils and synods. Why should not the holiness of the name of God be attested to in a novel, at the theater, or in a motion picture? The God whose name the Church must hallow is also called, in the Bible, the living God. If demoniac powers can corrupt all the domains of life, the glory of God Almighty can likewise let fall upon them its reflection. The Church must hallow the name of God by training in the school of revelation Christian thinkers, writers, artists, workmen, businessmen, in whom and through whom truth, purity, justice, and love may appear as holy realities in which God lets those participate who never grow weary of praying, with the humble, persevering, courageous, and joyous faith of true disciples of Christ: "Our Father . . . , hallowed be thy name!"

### ✻ III ✻

For, indeed, it is necessary to come down at last to ourselves! If the Church which prays, "Hallowed be thy name," learns to discern in its prayer a demand laid especially upon it, must we not say as much for each one of the faithful who offer to God the prayer of the Church Universal?

A word of Kierkegaard illuminates sharply everything which must be said in this regard: "Prayer is not founded in the truth when God hears that concerning which one prays to him; it is founded in the truth when *he who prays* continues to pray until he is himself the *one who hears* what God wants."

Do you really believe that it is possible for us to continue to pray that the name of God be hallowed without, sooner or later, hearing what God wants, namely that we sanctify his name by our own sanctification?

Let us not give way to the temptation to brush aside from our path the appeals and the promises, but also the warnings and perhaps the condemnations, which this word "sanctification" has the function to make reverberate in the utmost depths of our religious life. Let us not speak here of some outworn pietism or of some dangerous sentimentalism. If there is one divine requirement for us which is clearly formulated in Christ's instruction and that of his apostles, it is indeed that of sanctification.

"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," Jesus said to his disciples in this Sermon on the Mount in which we are taught the Lord's Prayer. "As he who called you is holy," wrote the apostle Peter, "be holy yourselves in all your conduct." Likewise wrote the apostle Paul: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification. . . . For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "Strive for . . . holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

Are these not the things that we *mean* when we pray in all sincerity, "Hallowed be thy name"? And do we not see from this that, called to hallow the name of God, we must march down a road, that of personal sanctification, which leads to a goal: holiness? "It does not yet appear what we shall be," wrote John

to the disciples of the apostolic age, "but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." It is in accepting this vocation to holiness, in offering ourselves for its accomplishment, that we will hallow the name of God.

I know very well that in certain quarters there are those who are pleased to say that "one of the most decisive factors in leading souls to leave Protestantism is that they do not find in their churches the spiritual nourishment indispensable to the fullness of the Christian life." They are ready to admit that "cases of superior, even heroic, holiness are met with in Protestantism." But, it is immediately added, "It is proper to suggest that these isolated cases are not in a relationship of effect to cause with regard to Protestant doctrine." The Holy Spirit would be acting in such cases not *through* but *within* our churches, separated as they are from the source of holiness.

May we know how to listen to these judgments with all humility. God doubtless puts before us, by means of such estimations which we may find severe, questions which we do not have the right to avoid. In the life of our churches, in our personal piety, do we give to sanctification and to the quest for holiness that high place which indisputably is assigned them by apostolic teaching? I am afraid that the concern of some to set forth in utter clarity the great affirmations of the faith, together with the determination of others to insist that the Church and its members take a resolute stand in the fields where rival social and political



ideologies confront one another, may sometimes keep our churches from constantly reminding their people of the call of God: "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." These special concerns may lead church members to think that the churches are incapable of "helping them meet all their personal needs for moral and religious perfection."

We must honestly recognize that there are diverse conceptions of sanctification and holiness. Just as the churches issuing from the Reformation offer no other foundation for their confession of faith, their form of worship, and their discipline than the revelation heard in Holy Scriptures, so they can offer no other foundation for their doctrine of sanctification and of holiness than this same revelation. Evangelical holiness excludes certain forms of monastic asceticism and certain dangerous types of mystical life. Paul and John are the two great witnesses to whom we must always return to reawaken the consciousness of our vocation and to learn how to hallow the name of God, the name of "our Father," in our most intimate personal life, in our relations with our brethren in the Church of Jesus Christ, but also with the totality of men before whom our lives ought to be a witness to the holiness of God, that holiness which is truth, justice, love, and peace. Therefore let us pray as Luther instructed us to, "that it might be given to us to make visible this great joy and this great peace of which we so often speak. May people observe this joy and this peace in our lives."

You can readily imagine that it is not without fear

and trembling that a Christian preacher pronounces such words. If they condemn his brethren, they condemn him himself, first of all. But even this condemnation helps us all to discern that the sanctification and the holiness of which the apostles speak to us have nothing in common with that rigid moralism, all too often frigid, blighted, and blighting, of which we must admit that we sometimes give an unfortunate demonstration. We are irresistibly brought back to the unique source of sanctification and holiness, where God desires that we satisfy our thirst, and that is his grace, his grace only. The grace which saves us when we grasp it through faith is the grace that sanctifies us in order that we may sanctify the name of God, not in separating ourselves from the world, but in being in the world victorious over evil and given power to accomplish those good works through which our faith must express its gratitude. The grace which saves us and which sanctifies us is the grace which makes of us new creatures, living the new life of sons of God.

This grace, by whom does it come to us? By Jesus Christ. How does it sanctify us? In making us participate in the holiness of Jesus Christ, "whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

#### ✻ IV ✻

Now we arrive at the most intimate part of this second meditation, at what must at the same time mark its summit. It is Jesus Christ who for the Father

gives to the petition of the Church and of the Christian, "Hallowed be thy name," its complete answer. He proclaims by his life and by his death that the *name* of God, his character, his person, has no part whatsoever in the sin of mankind, no slightest tolerance for this sin which he hates and condemns, and that, at the same time, the ardor of his love is wholly devoted to bringing sinful mankind back to himself, to saving men.

"I will vindicate the holiness of my great name," declared God to one of his prophets. It was necessary to do away with all the ambiguity with which natural man, because his nature is perverted, always surrounds the divine person. Once and for all it was necessary to take off the masks with which man has decked him. There is no possible compromise between God and impurity, between God and lies, between God and hypocrisy, between God and the hardness of heart and the pride which man has in himself, the hatred which he feels with regard to his brother.

The cross of Calvary has raised up forever upon the earth the frontier boundary between the holiness of God and the sin of man. The word of Christ in his priestly prayer, "I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated," signifies his determination to be set apart, to be consecrated as the victim sacrificed and offered up to him of whom it is written: "Thou . . . art of purer eyes than to behold evil," and whose justice must be accomplished. But at the same time the Cross reveals to us the unfathomable grandeur of a love which, not permitting itself to be stopped by any

refusal, does not draw back from the total gift, in which God declares to us that, though his holiness is justice, it is also mercy and grace.

This double revelation in the Cross was not immediately evident to the first disciples. When darkness covered Jerusalem, they felt at the very first only an inexpressible horror with regard to the death of their Master on Golgotha. The *name* of their God, this name of Father which so often they had heard from the lips of Jesus, was it not profaned, vilified in the most irremediable fashion, by the victory of the enemies of their Master? After such a failure, could it ever be hallowed?

"I will vindicate the holiness of my great name," God had promised through his prophet. And behold now the light of Easter morning, which expels forever the darkness of Calvary. The apostles launch out on all the highways of the world to announce that God has raised up Jesus. In giving his life on Calvary, in allowing himself to be made sin, as Paul expressed it, in offering himself in sacrifice, Christ accomplished perfectly the redemptive will of his Father. The same eternal love incarnate in the man Jesus, dying at Golgotha, is attested in the resurrection of the only Son of God and by his ascension to glory. Because Christ had chosen to hallow the name of the Father even through death, God had hallowed his own name. He had "highly exalted" the Son, and "bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue



confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In this fashion the faith and the adoration of Paul burst into song. But he knew that although exalted in eternal glory, Christ was not a distant Lord. Paul knew that, having hallowed the name of the Father in himself, in his human existence and his human death, Christ hallows it still in the life of his disciples and in their sanctification. This is the conclusion to which our meditation of the first petition of the Lord's Prayer leads us. The Church and its faithful members must hallow the name of God; they must overwhelm the world with the evidence that the cause of God, which they have made their cause, is the most holy of all causes because it is the cause of righteousness, truth, peace, and love. But this they cannot do except when the Lord of glory is altogether close to them and, by his Spirit, his life becomes their life. With what trembling impatience they then look beyond all that is yet in their hearts of pettiness, filth, and enslavement to sin! No, Christ has not deceived his disciples; the name of his Father will be hallowed in the Church and in its members because it is already hallowed in him. The Church, on the day indicated by its Lord, will appear before him "holy and without blemish." And his faithful ones, "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all," will adore him who answers the prayer of the Church Universal and manifests his holiness in the holiness of his children.

*Amen.*



## CHAPTER THREE

*Thy Kingdom Come,  
Thy Will Be Done,  
On Earth as It Is in Heaven*

MATTHEW 6:10

TO CONSIDER in one and the same meditation two petitions of the Lord's Prayer which put such serious questions to the Church and to its members as do the above is to set out on an undertaking which invites the accusation of superficiality. I am inclined, however, to think that because these two petitions orient our prayer toward the final victory over sin, we ought to try to listen to what they together tell us, both the first and the second, of the ultimate triumph of God. If Jesus put them in the heart and on the lips of his disciples, the least that can be said is that this is because he believed their answer possible. They carry before the Father,

then, a hope implanted in the deepest faith of the Church by its Lord. Even more than a hope: the firm assurance that the true destiny of the world is revealed in what they say and that it will be accomplished.

It is indeed toward these immense horizons that the first three requests of the Lord's Prayer, intimately linked one with the other, compel us to direct our vision. Let us never grow weary of rendering thanks that they call us to give first place in our prayer to the glory of God and to the accomplishment of his designs. The earth and the heavens present themselves to our contemplation as the field where divine action is taking place. This action tends toward a goal, a goal which we must desire with God by making it our own through our very intercession, the ultimate coming of the kingdom of God announced by Christ. It is not our poor little individual existence which our prayer must first of all bring before God, whatever pride we may take in it; it is of his work, willed even before the creation of the world, pursued untiringly since the fall for the sake of the redemption of the world, that we must speak to him. Once more, do we conform our lives to the very precise commandment of Jesus? Do we at least endeavor to take it seriously? If we pray according to the will of Christ, we are never left to such contemplation as would lead us to forget the enormous problem of our personal faithfulness and that of the Church. Our prayer, quite to the contrary, then places us before such a call to obedience as will in no wise permit us to escape making a decision. We cannot demand that the reign of

God come and that his will be done without the most searching questions being put to us ourselves.

Doubtless it is not without relevance to recall that these two petitions of the Lord's Prayer, like the rest moreover, must be listened to, meditated upon, prayed, in the climate of the invocation: "Our Father who art in heaven."

The kingdom for whose coming we have asked is the kingdom of a God whose fatherly love envelops his creatures; it is the will of a Father which must be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven; and it is to "our Father," and not to a God far away and hidden, concerned above all else with affirming his power, that we bring our prayer, having the confidence of a son that he hears us and wishes to grant what we request.



"Thy kingdom come!"

One prefatory remark is necessary: The same Hebrew term, corresponding to one sole Greek word, is sometimes translated in modern languages as *reign* and sometimes as *kingdom*. Our usage distinguishes, in fact, between the *reign*, or the royalty, marks of power and authority, and the *kingdom*, by which we designate the country where a king reigns. The choice of that one of these terms which is appropriate in such and such a passage evidently depends upon a network of circumstances and delicate shades of meaning in the text which call forth the science, and I should even say the exegetical tact, of the translators. You will un-

derstand that I do not here dwell upon this point, but it is fitting to point out its importance.

Whatever the problem here, the hope that God will establish at some moment in history his reign or his kingdom dates from several centuries before the moment when Jesus Christ, following John the Baptist, proclaimed the solemn exhortation: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." To tell the truth, the Old Covenant has always been permeated by the expectation, expressed in various forms, of an ultimate triumph of God. But, beginning with the eighth century B.C., the great prophets of Israel were the real heralds of this victory. The messianic expectation, so characteristic of Israel after the Exile, is undeniably the fruit of their preaching. Such preaching could indeed excite indignation and call forth denials; but it nonetheless impregnated the Israelite people with the certainty that at the hour chosen by his wisdom and his mercy, God will respond to the prayers and the expectations of the righteous by a decisive intervention which will mark the inauguration of his reign.

Let us not attempt to enumerate the multiple interpretations given to the two petitions which are our text. There are some, however, that it is necessary resolutely to discard. I have met Christians so totally persuaded that the coming of the kingdom of God is independent of all human effort that they thought they were permitted to fall back into a passivity dangerously favorable to spiritual laziness, and they ended up by judging even prayer itself useless. Since

man can do nothing, why should he seek to intervene before him upon whom alone everything depends? The only thing to do is to wait for God to act.

For others, to pray that the will of God be done on earth as in heaven means to take, in the face of life and its trials and the griefs which it brings, an attitude of resignation. How can we fail to respect the disciples of Christ who cling, if I may dare to put it so, to this petition of the Lord's Prayer for fear of being vanquished by bitterness or the spirit of revolt, thus declaring to God that they resign themselves to the blows which fall upon them and so let their bodies and their very hearts be bruised and broken? They recall that in Gethsemane, Christ prayed: "Not my will, but thine, be done." If he resigned himself, he the Lord, to drinking the cup before which he had at first drawn back, how can the Christian, overwhelmed by sickness, broken by bereavement, do other than feel himself obliged to adopt a similar spirit of resignation?

Is it necessary to repeat that resignation is not a Christian virtue? And that there is no relationship between the act of faith and love by which Christ affirmed, in the midst of a veritable tempest within his soul, that the will of God must be *first*, and the "resignation," called Christian, before that which one acknowledges to be inevitable because it is desired and willed by a superior power whose action cannot be impeded? There is an unconscious fatalism in this interpretation of our prayer, which is singularly different from the victorious acceptance of suffering, and still more, from the offering of oneself anew every



day to the will of God, who is known, loved, and obeyed as Father.

Yes, it is indeed of a victory that we here speak to God, of his own victory over all the forces of Satan. To ask that it be finally and utterly won is to recognize that it is not yet so attained. The Lord's Prayer is not a prayer of beatific optimism, such as so often, before the two World Wars, found in human *progress* the foundation of its expectation of the coming of God's kingdom. It seemed that with the co-operation of all those who were inspired by an *ideal*, as one then liked to put it, an ideal of justice, liberty, and peace, humanity approached ever closer, year after year, to the kingdom of God. We have come back from such delusions, from the cult of progress, from the religion of science. The horrors of which the camps of torture and of death have marked the temporary summit constrain us to recognize what the Evil One of whom the Lord's Prayer speaks is capable of making of men and doing through men. We have been thrown into the full reality of the sin, the ignominies, and the atrocities that he engenders. And it is in the face of all that has been lived and suffered by persons whom we have loved, it is in the face of all that of which the memory, mixed with anxiety, sometimes freezes our inward beings with horror, that, in the communion of the Church universal, we persist in praying:

Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.

Who could be astonished that men are losing faith before the vicious fanning out of demoniac forces in our time and in the face of their triumph? But that Christians, their eyes wide open to the most tragic reality, and by no means consenting to make "vain repetitions," have prayed the Lord's Prayer in the concentration camps at Dachau and Auschwitz or on the "scorched earth" of their Korean fatherland—who would not see in these acts a striking miracle of the grace of God?

Passivity? Resignation? Never! It is rather the most audacious defiance thrown at him whom Jesus calls the "prince of this world," at him whom a Bernanos, opening on him the door of contemporary literature, has so often shown prowling close to man and—worse yet, alas—seeking to dispute with the grace at work in the deepest depths within us even the hope that one day, emancipated from sin, we shall know the freedom and the peace of children of God.

Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.

It suffices that the Church and we within her walls should bring to God these words which Christ has given us as our prayer in order that in the midst of a humanity shackled by fear, hatred, despair, a song of hope and of victory may be heard in the secret depths of souls yet prisoners of sin. To pray in this manner is to proclaim that the destiny of the world is neither

that it should sink, along with our civilizations which now we recognize to be mortal, in a gigantic disorder which no human effort will be able to surmount, nor, completely to the contrary, that it should become a slave of a totalitarianism which brings its order to triumph by slaying liberty. It is to affirm that God has a purpose with regard to the world, that we are not forever abandoned to the good pleasure of Satan, that the father of our "first-born brother," Jesus Christ, desires that his will be accomplished on earth just as it is in heaven, and that we are advancing toward a meeting point, an *event*, of which no one, not even the Son, knows the hour, and by which it will be manifested before the eyes of all that God is the Victor.

All this, I know, may appear absurd to certain of you. What value do the affirmations of the Christian faith have today in view of the triumphant demonstration of historical materialism or the despairing negations of atheistic existentialism? Do not they, the one and the other, pretend to inter us in our earth-prison with its injustices and its wretchedness? The former would have us hope that our distant descendants will know the successful cure for these ills, even as the latter insists that no human presence will ever put an end to the frightful loneliness of our earthly prison cell. And still Christian faith, solely upon the word of Jesus Christ, believes that its prayer will be answered, awaits, salutes in advance, the coming of the kingdom of God, and bears in itself the firm confidence that to the joyous obedience of the angels and the blessed ones in heaven will one day respond, on a reno-

vated earth, the filial and final assent of mankind to the will of "our Father who art in heaven."

## ✻ II ✻

How can we in our contemporary world, such as we know it to be—how can you and I continue to believe that if Christ taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer, it is in order that we might pray it with the absolute certainty that it will be answered? To this question there is only one answer: It is because of Jesus Christ.

Not only because Christ has ordained for his disciples that they should "pray then like this," even though there certainly is in his commandment a sufficient motive for the acquiescence of every Christian. But furthermore because, from the first day of his public ministry, he announced the coming of the kingdom of God. One would need time to show the rich diversity of his teaching on this point. The kingdom (or the reign), is it of the present or the future? Spiritual or social? Whatever answer one gives to these questions can be supported by the words of Jesus. There is nothing rigid in his conception of the kingdom of God or of his own royalty; all is plasticity, suppleness, and delicate nuance. I remember the definition which a Christian social thinker once attempted to give of the kingdom of God; it took up fourteen lines crammed with difficult terms—but in the end one felt that the gospel notion of the kingdom, far from letting itself be imprisoned in this interminable formula, burst through it at every point.

Always through the words of Christ we glimpse an



essentially religious reality, which is nothing other than the final accomplishment of the plan of grace, ever the same, which God has pursued throughout the centuries. Tremendous adventure where God, faced with the sin of man, his resistance, his refusal, his denial, possesses a weapon of which Satan, more than any other, knows the efficacy: the infinite patience of God's eternal love! The victory will come, but it will not be the brutal triumph of one force crushing its adversary; it will be a new beginning laid in history, bearing in itself not only the promise, but already the reality, of the reign of God.

It will be? No, it already *is*. Jesus Christ *is* this new beginning. His human presence signifies a breaking through the determinisms of history, an act of the sovereign liberty of God, the decisive sign that it is to him, and not to the Evil One, that the last word will belong. Ah! how readily we understand that Jesus should have said one day to his disciples: "The kingdom of God has come upon you," and on yet another occasion (even though the translation is contested): "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you." Because his "food is to do the will" of the Father, and his filial obedience is given without the slightest failing, he is himself the presence of the reign of God.

We are once more before one of the great paradoxes of the gospel. Christ asks us to pray that the kingdom of God should come and that his will should be done on earth as it is in heaven, but we can only do so because in Christ this reign has already come and this will is already accomplished now. He knew the



victory had been attained when he cried out, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The Cross, the victory of Easter, the elevation to glory, all is given, like the royalty of the Father, in the coming of the Son. And so Karl Barth is right in saying: "The last word has been pronounced. There is nothing more to change in all this. We live on this event." But at the same time he adds: "This implies that we have all the more reason to pray: 'Thy kingdom come.' There is no contradiction in this."

### III

No, there is no contradiction, because the prayer of the Church Universal has no other support than the *event* by which the world was overturned nineteen centuries ago and which is called the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church knows that this event is something altogether different from a poor little attempt on the part of God to wrest from Satan his empire. It manifests the omnipotence of the love which knows itself to be strong enough to accept the apparent defeat of Calvary, because the light of Easter will make visible in the Cross the revelation of the sovereignty of grace.

But it is necessary that the Church, by its prayer, indicate its will not to impede the execution of the plan of God. It is necessary that she, listening to the second and third petitions of the Lord's Prayer with as much attention as to the first, find herself led to supplicate God "to liberate her from the interminable imperfection of her obedience."

For let it be said again, to pray, and especially to pray the Lord's Prayer, is to enlist upon the way of obedience. Assuredly the *when* and the *how* of the coming of God's kingdom depend in no wise upon us. God is alone judge of the times and the means. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." Moreover, to pray that his kingdom come is not only to prepare ourselves for its coming; it is also to make the decision to do nothing which is an obstacle to its coming. Similarly, to ask that the will of the Father be done on earth as it is in heaven is either vain repetition or the very solemn affirmation that we abandon our life to God in order that he may make us will what he wills and accomplish what we ourselves shall then will by unreserved acceptance of his will.

The Church prays: "Thy kingdom come." In the midst of men the Church must be and is the vigilant sentinel who awaits the coming of the kingdom. But she must likewise be the herald of this kingdom, not to certain privileged individuals but among the multitudes to whom she must make her testimony heard. He who has taught her how to pray forbids her to believe that, for the preparation for the ultimate triumph of God, she can do nothing other than pray. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." The end, that is to say, the completion of the time of the Church which was inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ and the beginning of the "new

age"—I employ the expression of the Scriptures—this end will be that of his return in glory and of the accession of the kingdom in which "God may be everything to every one."

The missionary vocation of the Church has, therefore, its deepest roots in the prayer that the kingdom of God come. The Church which thus prays is summoned to co-operate for the answering of its prayer by carrying to all the nations the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. This prayer and the mission of the Church to the world are so indissolubly tied together, by the very will of the Head of the Church, that it is possible to say that churches whose members are left indifferent or even hostile by the missionary task have not yet learned to pray the Lord's Prayer, and above all else to listen to it with the will to take seriously the requirements which it sets before their faith. One of its fundamental requirements is assuredly that the Church proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ not only in those regions where it has taken root in the course of preceding centuries but everywhere that the good news has not yet been announced. Paul only developed the saying of Christ which I have just recalled to you when he said to the Christians of Rome, concerning the Jews and the pagans: "How are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?"

Pity Christians who remain deaf to such calls!  
Pity Protestant churches which do not recognize in

evangelism and missions the essential function of the Church, thereby forcing the missionary enterprise carried out in their name to run the gravest risks! On the contrary, happy are the churches which do not accept it as normal that the great majority of men ignore the entire gospel, the churches which do not draw back from either the labor of intercession or the sacrifice of men and of money in order that the great news of the love of God may be announced to the peoples of the earth. John Chrysostom, the most powerful Christian preacher of the fourth century, one day said: "He who prays has his hand on the rudder of the world." He discovered, you see, the immense horizons which true prayer embraces with the eye of faith. But what should we then say today when in our world, shrunk by the growing rapidity of the means of communication, immense multitudes live still—perhaps it is necessary to say live more than ever—without God and without hope, without the God of saving grace, without the hope of victory over death and of life eternal? Or rather, what is it that God is saying to us today? What is he saying to his churches which repeat to him, "Thy kingdom come"? Does it never seem to us that we hear him beseeching them to come out of their egoism, of their withdrawal into themselves, inviting them to discern the signs of the times, to cross through the doors everywhere open in spite of obstacles and opposition, and to give the messengers who, on all the roads of the earth, will prepare in the hearts of men the coming of the Lord?

The prayer of the Church Universal bears in it the



calling of the Church to the evangelization of the world. The Church must take this world *such as it is* into her love and her prayer, preparing salvation for it through her mission. Then only will she not have a bad conscience in praying those words: "Thy kingdom come!"

#### IV

The prayer of the Church—do not we also, its faithful members, in our personal life offer it to God? Already in our first meditation we have seen it come back to us individually, bearing an appeal which it was impossible not to hear. And today, when in private we hear ourselves praying, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are obliged to stop, for a question is put to us: "What do *you* do in order that the will of God may be accomplished among men? And, first of all, do you really care to do it yourself, from the moment that it is revealed to you by God in his Word and attested to in your conscience by his Holy Spirit?"

It is not always easy to discern the will of God for his children. We are sometimes in a twilight zone where we are inclined to take our own will for the will of God. Sometimes life places us at crossroads where we have much trouble recognizing the way of fidelity. I feel a certain reserve, I confess, before Christians who always know perfectly what God has decided for them. Humble and persevering prayer alone leads us to the full clarity which God may think well to make us, for a time, await. And, in the petitions which



we are now discussing, we end always by hearing the orders which our Lord gives us. But are we really resolved to ask him for the strength to obey?

Let us not respond too hastily that we are doing this divine will in the measure that we know it. Let us not be too prompt to believe, for the reason that those who observe our lives are ready to bear witness to our morality, our attachment to our family life and to our professional duties, to our interest in the work of God and of our church, even to our piety—to believe for this reason that we are doing on earth the will of God as it is done in heaven. That which others see of us often has no relationship to that which God sees, not of our appearances but of our deeper life, with its recesses, its detours, and its shallows. And he knows, he only, what we prefer not to confess to ourselves—that in the very moment when we say to him, “Thy will be done on earth,” and therefore “be done” in me and through me, we are not always eager to do that which without any possible doubt we know it to be. Perhaps we have even decided not to do it, to do that which *we* want to do and which is contrary to what God wants.

Ah! how cursed are these roots of evil in us, to which grace has borne a mortal blow, but which do not wish altogether to die, and which infect our inner life! How many transgressions, doubtless known alone to ourselves, have we committed against the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old. . . . But I say to you. . . .” And how many acts of disobedience, great

or small, open or carefully camouflaged, to the new law of love: "Love one another, even as I have loved you"! In truth, the more we present ourselves to the light which Christ, because he is the Light of the world, casts into the very soul of his disciples, the more we are compelled to recognize that all the forces contrary to God's will find in us I know not what secret complicity.

Must we then confess ourselves vanquished? Must we renounce the prayer which Christ has put in our hearts? Shall we give ourselves over to the tyranny of our instincts, of our lusts, of our egoism, or of our pride? This is the moment for everyone who calls himself a Christian to persevere in prayer. It is the moment to put into our recital "Thy will be done on earth" the cry of our anguish and of our distress, but also our faith that the will of God is to unite our wills to his own, to make us love and desire his will, and to aid us to accomplish it day after day in the unfolding of our daily existence. This is the moment to persevere in prayer and to decide if we really choose for God or for the world.

To become by the grace of God a Christian who, knowing God's will for him, finds his joy in obeying the Lord both in small and great things and asks of him the secret of a humble and courageous fidelity—such must be our primary ambition. Let us praise God for having let us meet on our way disciples of Christ in whom all was joyous, freely consented obedience or, in days of trial, that acceptance which transfigures suffering by making it a power for ascending

toward a more radiant light. But let us ask him especially for the same grace of obedience and of faithfulness for ourselves.

I think at this time of those whom sickness or age has reduced to inactivity, perhaps to immobility. In the face of the immense tasks to which we are called by the prayer on which we are meditating, how feeble and powerless you feel, incapable of doing anything which contributes to preparing the coming of the kingdom of God!

My brothers and sisters, do not yield to these thoughts! A magnificent ministry is offered to each one of you: that of prayer. In your solitude or in your inactivity, take the Lord's Prayer as the companion of your days and of your sleepless nights. Try in praying it to give to each one of the first three petitions—we do not yet speak of the others—the fullness of meaning that they contain and that our meditations are a long way from having exhausted. Let God make you co-workers with him in the service of his cause, the cause which he wants us to make our own. Let him lead you to contemplate the glories of heaven, where the angels find their rapture in doing his will. Come out of yourselves, of your preoccupations, even of your trials, to take into your intercession the Church, its witness, its mission to the very ends of the world. Pray that this immense labor, often difficult and painful, may be accomplished with a love that is generous and disinterested. Nourish your prayer with all that is, upon the earth, the cause of God and consequently the cause of man, his deliverance, his

true happiness. You will discover then that, however solitary, however inactive in appearance you may be, you have entered into the great family of those whom Christ called "the sons of the kingdom," whose prophetic lives testify now to the ultimate victory. Ah! that with you we also, where God calls us to serve him, might know the joy of seeing that the prayer of our Lord is already answered and that his kingdom comes!

*Amen.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

# *Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread*

MATTHEW 6:11

IF WE were not treating the prayer taught by Christ to his disciples, we should no doubt be tempted to cry out, "What disconcerting disorder!" We have just contemplated, beyond the present age, the triumphant completion of God's plan with regard to the world. We will later be placed in the presence of the holy realities of forgiveness and life emancipated from sin. But here, between contemplation of heaven and the call upon the mercy of God, we must make a place in our prayer for an altogether material concern, for preoccupation with our nourishment, and that in its most elementary, most humble form: our daily bread! Unless we resign ourselves to mechanical repetitions, is our spiritual life capable of changing so rapidly from plane to plane?

Have your reflections on the Lord's Prayer perhaps led you to some such thoughts? As for me, in this ap-



parent disorder I see a magnificent order! Christ asks us in our prayer to put God's cause before our own, to speak to "our Father" of his glory and his triumph, before recounting to him our needs. However, he does not wish that what is necessary for the life of his children should be passed over in silence. And what is it that is first of all necessary to his creature in order that it accomplish on earth its vocation as a son of God, unless it be that it exist, that its physical existence be assured? In teaching us to ask for our daily bread before we ask for the pardon of our sins, Christ authorizes us to think that there are indeed situations of material distress, of dietary deficiency, which paralyze the spiritual life, and that it is normal that the glorious liberty of children of God be experienced by men who have eaten sufficiently to satisfy their hunger. Still another consideration comes to mind: Where else then could this petition have been placed in the Lord's Prayer than where Jesus inserted it? Between the petition for forgiveness and that for deliverance, or completely at the end of the prayer? It would be then that we should be unable to escape from an impression of disorder. In truth, that which doubtless no liturgical commission would have dared to imagine, Christ in his wisdom desired for his disciples: as soon as the concern for the glory of God has been first affirmed, we can, we must, proceed to speak to our Father in heaven about ourselves, putting at the very outset the fundamental requirement of our life, namely that indispensable vital energies be granted us.

Thus we see how the second part of the Lord's Prayer is connected with the first. "It is because God is the Lord of the heavens and of the earth that we can ask him for the nourishment necessary each day to the preservation of the life which he has given us," and in which he wants the grandeur of his pardon and of his victory over the Evil One to be manifested. But God is also the Father; and the liberty, given to those whom he has adopted as sons, of laying before him a request whose object is so material, is underlined by the contrasts between the accent of the first three petitions and that of the last three. When it is God's cause, our words form, rather than a prayer, a fervent wish: "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come." But now, Karl Barth notes, "the prayer becomes direct, explicit, imperative. . . . Notice the boldness, I should even say the temerity, of this appeal. Behold man, who dares to trouble God in order that he busy himself with his affairs!" "It is up to thee to take our human cause in hand," we seem suddenly to say to God. But has not God, already in the Ten Commandments, forever bound his own cause to that of man?

Let us now approach the words of our text: "Give us this day our daily bread."



I am obliged still another time—and this will not be the last—to point out to you a difficulty of translation. The Greek word *epiousios*, translated "daily," is found nowhere else than in our text and in the parallel passage of the Gospel of Luke. Should we give this

word, as does the most eminent dictionary, the sense of "necessary to existence"? Should we, relying upon another etymology, translate it "for the present day"? Or "for the coming day"? But the latter is not necessarily tomorrow; the prayer may be offered in the morning for the dawning day, and Father Lagrange quite rightly remarks that the word rendered "this day" suggests this translation. The question would be settled if one knew with certainty the Aramaic word which Jesus used. It is very likely that he used a term which means quite simply "of the day." Let us continue then, as we do in our services, to say: our *daily* bread.

Is it really of our bread that the prayer speaks, of the bread which is found today on our table and which we count on seeing there tomorrow and through all the days to come?

Certain commentators, no doubt troubled because of the material character of the request, have sought to spiritualize its object. "It is not at all appropriate," they were saying already in the time of Calvin, "that the children of God, who should be spiritual, not only fix their desires upon terrestrial things, but also envelop God in such things along with themselves." Bread, they would argue, should here be regarded as the symbol of that which nourishes the soul. Has not Christ confirmed the declaration of Deuteronomy: "Man does not live by bread alone, but . . . by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord"? The "daily bread" of the Lord's Prayer would then essentially signify the divine strength necessary to the

combats, to the endurance, to the faith, of each day. Christ, however, called himself "the bread of life." Is this not the proof that, on his lips, the word bread readily takes on an altogether spiritual meaning? For the authors of whom I am speaking, this meaning tones down the brusque change from one plane to another to which I made allusion a while back, and thus renders superfluous the interpretation of this shift which I have given.

No! We must not seek to eliminate from our petition its primary significance, which makes us traverse the field of temporal concerns. Furthermore, it is appropriate that we state exactly all that it implies! Luther saw in bread everything that gives the Christian a material existence free from grinding worry: nourishment, clothing, shelter, but also the family, a peaceful life enriched with faithful friendships, flowing on in a well-governed society. Karl Barth does not condemn such an expansion of the idea; he is, nevertheless, right in insisting upon the very evident simplicity of the request. In order that we subsist, a minimum of nourishment is indispensable—the "vital minimum," according to an expression constantly employed today in France in discussions relative to wages. Without this minimum the life of the body is imperiled and, with it, the entire intellectual, professional, spiritual activity of the man. Jesus knew this still better than we. The poor were numerous in his era, and it was not rare for beggars to be mixed with the crowd which gathered about to hear him. Famines were only too well known in the Middle



East, with their train of suffering and of deaths. If Jesus predicted that they would come again, it was certainly by founding his prediction on repeated facts. Mingled with the memory of the tragic misery suffered by Jacob and his sons must have been the knowledge of more recent experiences. The bit of bread indispensable to the continuation of existence no doubt took on, under these circumstances, a character of extreme fragility. Thanks to it, horrible hunger is avoided. "To ask God to give us bread signifies therefore to have resort to his free grace which holds us and maintains us at the edge of the abyss of hunger and of death."

It is indeed this grace which Christ exhorts his disciples to ask of him who wants to be their Father and loves them as his children. "Ask, and it will be given you," he tells them. And he adds: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"

What better thing than daily bread could be accorded to men who have to furnish the work, likewise daily, thanks to which the life of the household is assured?

However, Barth is right in reminding us that, in the Bible, "the word *bread* is also the temporal sign of the grace of God." "Bread is the promise, and not only the promise, but also the presence of that nutriment which nourishes for good and forever." It is then not a question of spiritualizing the object of our prayer, but, listening to the promise which is made to us



in it, of discerning how far the action of this grace, of which we expect that it maintain us in existence, really reaches. Let us not fear that an excessive importance might here be given to our bodily life. For it also is a symbol. This life, however precarious and fragile it may be, bears in it a promise of the life to which God calls us. This is why we must ask of "our Father who art in heaven" that he accord us the necessary subsistence for the life of our bodies. Bodies of misery and humiliation, said the apostle Paul, but at the same time, for the Christian, temples of the Holy Spirit, which edifies in them, little by little, the man of eternity.

## ❧ II ❧

"Our Father . . . , give us this day our daily bread." This prayer of the Church Universal must have a meaning for each disciple of Christ, whether he be poor or rich. Has it really a meaning for the rich man?

I am not thinking here of those "rich people" whose waste and prodigality are an offense to the wretchedness of so many other human creatures. I am thinking of those whom the poor consider as rich precisely because they can be sure, in contrast with the poor, of having each day enough money to send for purchases at the bakery or go there themselves for their "daily bread." When they pray the Lord's Prayer, what significance can they give to the request that we are considering?

Am I mistaken in believing that a large number of my readers are perfectly untroubled as to the bread

which they wish to eat today, tomorrow, and in the following days? Even if prices rise still higher, they are sure that they will always be able to procure bread. Certainly it may be necessary for them to restrict themselves as to more expensive items of nourishment and, in a more general fashion, to restrict what is called their standard of living. But bread! They will never lack *it*. Therefore, if their temporal situation really does guarantee to them in advance this possession, why should they ask God to give it to them? Is it even fitting that they ask him for it? If the Lord's Prayer did not incite them to do so, would the idea of speaking to God about their daily bread ever have come into their minds?

These privileged persons forget only one thing: Christ commands them to say not give *me my* daily bread, but give *us our* daily bread. Once again the Lord's Prayer reminds us of its fundamental character: prohibition to the disciples of Christ to go each one for himself before God; obligation for them to take their brothers in Christ with them, in their thoughts and in their love, when they approach God to pray to him. Whether this be easy for us or not—let us have the honesty not to be blind to the fact that it is we ourselves who are in question—we must, because of the Lord's Prayer, pass through an apprenticeship in the Christian life under circumstances in which we are sure ourselves of not dying of hunger in the coming days. But do we have the same certainty for all those who today are with us, like us, members of the Church of Jesus Christ?

In what world do we pray this prayer? We were recalling a little while ago the age when Jesus lived on earth, marked as it was by misery and famine. But our world, how does it appear to us when we ask God, in the communion of the Church, for the bread which all the disciples of Christ must expect from his hand?

Misery? The anguish of tomorrow's bread for wife and children? Alas! In France this "vital minimum," of which we have already spoken, is lacking to a considerable number of workers and also of the "economically weak." (What a tragic expression!) We prefer not to think about it, not to look the reality in the face. Were we to do so, would it not be to consent in advance to sacrifices that it will indeed be necessary to demand of those whose bread is assured, in order that their security might become that of all men? In putting out of our minds the image of what actually exists we do not thereby suppress its existence. When we who are rich, not according to our opinion, certainly, but according to that of those who today are acquainted with hunger, say to God, "Give us this day our daily bread," we cannot, if we are sincere before God, avoid seeing pass before our eyes the procession of all those throughout the world who suffer from hunger.

For we live in a world which is hungry. Recently I was leafing through the first volume of a collection called *The Geography of Hunger*. There is hunger in Germany, where more than ten million refugees present to Europe, to the governments, to the churches,

to the international organizations, a fearful food-supply problem. There is hunger in South America, where undernourishment is the rule in several states. There is hunger, there is starvation, in India, where famine, such as kills millions of human beings, has laid waste. More than half the population of the world is insufficiently nourished, suffers from a diet such as is unable to furnish to the human body what it requires in order to act without being immediately borne down with lassitude or paralyzed in advance by an insurmountable weakness. Whether they be pagans, Mohammedans, Jews, unbelievers, or Christians, these men, these women, these children, whom sharp hunger will accompany perhaps until their death, is of little importance at this moment. Among them, in any case, are found in great number the *us* of our prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread."

The Church cannot escape from the anguish of the social problem, for every time that she prays the Lord's Prayer, it thrusts itself upon her attention, calls for her study, for her initiation of bold steps, or at the very least, necessary suggestions. The name of God is not hallowed by Christians who throw a veil of modesty over the miseries of the hungry peoples of Europe, America, Africa, or Asia. His certain will is that those who have a superfluity, or simply the necessary, share with those who do not have even that. "Share your bread with the hungry," God says to us through the Prophet of the Exile. How should we not see that our prayer comes back to us with a ques-

tion from God? "Give us . . . ," we say to him. And he asks us: "Do you give . . . ?"

But what can we do about it, after all, if the situation is what I have just indicated? Do we have brothers and sisters in Christ among those who are hungry? Doubtless, but "am I my brother's keeper?" Dare we repeat the very words of Cain! How are we responsible for the present state of affairs? That we should, far from imitating the evil rich man in the parable, share our bread with our brothers in the faith, or with any of our fellow men, when they suffer at our door—this we must, we want to do! But do not ask us to assume the burden of the misery of all the famine-stricken of the earth!

What thanksgiving, however, we ought to raise up to God! He does not want to leave us tranquil, egoistically installed in a peaceful religious calm. He intends that his cause become our cause, and his cause is that of all his children, whether they know him, whether they accept him as their Father in heaven, or not. Certainly, we cannot alone solve the immense and tragic problems which assail us on every hand from the moment that we begin, in the school of the Lord's Prayer, to take our Christianity seriously. But we can ask our churches to devote their thought to them, to join together in the quest of solutions which they can propose. Need I say that the World Council of Churches knows well the specter of all this misery and considers it one of its essential tasks to work for at least its partial healing? It is up to us to encourage it,



to push it, to goad it on in its effort. It is up to us also, who are assured of our daily bread, to take upon us in our intercession the fundamental distress of the world.

### ❧ III ❧

But are we as certain as we think to be able to count each morning on our daily bread? Are we so prompt to forget the ordeals of a past which is still recent? Is the bread of the years of the war and the occupation in European countries already lost to memory? When wheat was no longer brought to the mill and the baker received no flour, rationing rapidly became inevitable. When fraudulent dealings complicated the short supplies, what remained of our daily bread rapidly took on the savor of corruption. With what fervor, however, did we ask of God to accord us each day that strange mixture! Then we were acquainted with hunger and its pangs, which were not always silenced by the relentless tasks at hand, or even by sleep!

In that time which appears to us today already so distant, who would have declared himself sure of his daily bread? The precariousness of all things, beginning with subsistence itself, was self-evident, and the petition for daily bread united us as a bond of anxiety and of hope. Is it necessary to remind you that this fragility remains? Let political or social troubles become manifest, let peace appear to be gravely menaced, and every sort of possibility will loom on the horizon of peoples who today are still, or are once again, privi-

leged. Ah! our request will then no longer be a vain repetition!

These memories and these possibilities should help us to understand the close relationship which exists between the daily bread that we ask of God and the peace of the world. That which menaces the peace is, above all else, the instability of a world where immense masses of men have the feeling that the injustice of their situation reduces them to a state of continual deficiency in vital energy. The badly nourished have no interest in defending reforms which satisfy the privileged. And, I repeat, the former are more numerous than the latter.

Social peace, which can only be based upon an equitable distribution of the products essential to the life of men, is the best gauge for the maintenance and consolidation of international peace. To pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," accepting the responsibilities and the sacrifices which this prayer implies, is to pray for the peace of the world. But *that*, do we consent to hear *that* in the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer?

And if we do hear it, are we ready to be disciples of Jesus Christ who use all the influence at their disposal in the social group which is theirs to compel their brothers among the privileged to tear from their eyes the blindfold which keeps them from seeing, in its poignant reality, the suffering and the economic distress of so great a number of their neighbors?

Is it necessary to repeat once more that in asking God for our daily bread, it is of the bread of others

that we speak to him as well as our own? But these others, who are they in the prayer that Jesus taught?

It is certain that the Sermon on the Mount contains in its rich diversity a complete teaching given by Jesus to his disciples. It is to them alone that he gives the command to *pray then like this*. That very little company of young men, which he had recruited in the very first days of his ministry, which it was his intention to make the core of the new Israel, which foreshadows the Church, which is already the Church—it is this group which receives of the Master the prayer of the Church Universal. It is for herself that the Church must address this prayer to God. The innumerable people who, from century to century, will be incorporated into the Church, in whatever branch it may be, will identify themselves with this prayer of the first disciples, will make it their own, and, praying it in the Church, will pray it for the Church and for its faithful members, because it is in the name of all and for all that each disciple says: "Our Father . . . , give us, forgive us, deliver us."

What then? Are the *others* of whom we have been thinking the *Christians*, uniquely the Christians, in this world? Is it for them alone, in a world menaced by famine, that we should request what is necessary for the preservation of life? Does not God need to trouble himself for all those—and what a multitude they constitute—who do not know him or do not yet accept him as Father?

The Sermon on the Mount answers these questions. Yes, the disciples of Christ must, in their communion

one with another, ask for bread and all that it signifies of him whose children they rejoice in knowing themselves to be. But they do not do so in the selfish desire to receive that which others are deprived of. They ask their bread in order to receive it from the hand of God, in faith and with thanksgiving; in order never to forget that they can expect only of their Father who is in heaven the benediction without which their temporal labor would not be effective. As for those who identify themselves with unbelief or with a belief which is foreign to the gospel, the providence of God reaches out to them also. God, declares Jesus, "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." The prayer of the disciples must bring before God all these individuals also, on condition that this prayer, like all prayer, is a personal commitment: "If your enemy is hungry," wrote Paul to the Christians in Rome, "feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink."

#### ✻ IV ✻

Can we, at this point to which we have come in our meditation, ask ourselves what meaning this petition we are studying has for the Christian whom poverty and the extreme uncertainty of his whole material existence plunge into a dread of each new day?

Perhaps this Christian, ceaselessly in danger, according to the terrible phrase, of "losing his daily bread," or ever in quest of a job which he does not succeed in finding, has the feeling of being himself the victim of the injustice of men. I dare to believe, however,

that he will not isolate himself in his anguish from all the brethren whom he ought to bring before God in his prayer, or at least from the rest of the unemployed who are the prey of hunger, the other undernourished people whom he meets along the road. But when he prays, "Give us," does he also think of the rich people who know the security which he himself does not possess? There is often more generosity in the hearts of those who are called poor than in the hearts of the rich. What a great thing it is to meet those who, because they would be Christians, forbid bitterness or hatred to triumph in their hearts, and so do not exclude from their prayer *any* brother in the faith!

Praying for themselves at the same time that they pray for all men, amid the insecurity of their temporal life they accomplish that act which is so difficult and so simple—which consists of trusting in God, in surrendering oneself without any reservation to his love and his generosity. Once again, it is very easy to say to God, "Give us," when one is certain of being able to procure for oneself that which one asks of him. But what a powerful example the Christian gives us who, possessing nothing and being unable to count on any human help, places before his Father in heaven, as he prays the prayer of our Lord, the distress and at the same time the confidence which fills his Christian soul! He also prays in the Church of Jesus Christ, in the Church which, without knowing his name, prays for him as for all the faithful, poor or rich, for whom God desires not death but life. How should he then not believe in the solidarity of the Church with him in his



misery? How should he then not think that it is in her and through her that his prayer will be answered?

Does saying to God, "Give us this day our daily bread," take away the right to say to men, and first of all to those whom we know as brothers in the faith: "Give us this day our daily bread"? Does putting confidence in God prohibit addressing to men an appeal to alleviate human misery, or even a request based on what appears to be simple justice? Does not God often use men to give answer in his name to the prayer of his children? And do not the latter therefore, after having bared their broken hearts before God, feel that they have the right to count on the brotherly love of the Church and on its sense of justice? All these questions and still others thrust themselves into our reflection as we extend our meditation upon this prayer, almost childlike in appearance, "Give us this day our daily bread." Ah! let us not avoid them; they open before our eyes horizons which our incredulity too often hides from us and which the Church should present more insistently for our faithful consideration.

The Church! She also, in her prayer, says to God: "Give us this day our daily bread." She needs bread for herself and for her ministers, for her work of evangelization and for her missionaries, for her witness in the nation and throughout the world. She asks for it—perhaps she sometimes succumbs to the temptation to ask it of men more than she does of God! But do her faithful members, united in this prayer, hear in it the summons which God is addressing *to them*? The bread of the Church? When then will we understand

that it is through us that God wants to give this bread, by our offerings and through our sacrifices? The daily bread which God wants to give to his Church is made up of Christians giving themselves just as they are in the 'communion of Christ, consecrating their strength and all they possess to the Lord's work, in and through the Church. How can we help blushing because of our selfishness, our avarice, our spiritual laziness, when we catch a glimpse of the truth that by us, through what we give and, much more, what we are, God wants to answer the prayer of the Church Universal: "Give us this day our daily bread"?

Through us? No, through Jesus Christ, who has answered this prayer which he himself has put in our hearts. "Apart from me you can do nothing," said he to his disciples. Outside him, without him, the Lord's Prayer, and especially the request upon which we have just meditated together, shrinks to the measure of our always reviving egoism. He only, teaching us to listen through this prayer to the kind of things which we ought to pray for in his name, lets us hear also in this prayer the call and promise of God. In it we are called to receive our life, our entire life, temporal and spiritual, the whole life of the earth and that of eternity—of which the first is but the sign—as the daily renewed gift of the Father's love. In it we hear the promise that in *him* is our unique and total security: "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But

seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

This is the tenor in which Jesus spoke as he taught his first disciples. Thus he is still speaking, to make us understand, Christians of the twentieth century, Christians of the atomic age, that serenity and peace, joy and life are granted not to men dominated by agitation and fear, but to those who, knowing themselves to be sons of their Father in heaven and desiring to be such, go to him in filial trust, never growing weary of saying to him in the name of all and for all: "Give us. . . ."

*Amen.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

# *And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors*

MATTHEW 6:12

WE HAVE now come to the moment in the Lord's Prayer where we discern why Christ could not himself pray this prayer with his disciples. For here the Lord's Prayer clearly appears as one which the Lord gives to his followers, but not as a prayer which he offers to his Father. The fifth petition, on which we are going to meditate, indicates in a decisive manner that between Jesus, who says, "Pray then like this," and the disciples to whom he is speaking, there is a fundamental distinction which we should take care not to tone down if we want to go to the very bottom of the meaning of our request. "Lord, teach us to pray," asked the disciples of their Master, after having seen him in prayer. And Jesus answered them: "When *you* pray, say . . .," and then he taught

them, in a somewhat abridged form, the same prayer as this in the Sermon on the Mount. *You*, and never *we*; he in whom there was never any sin, and whom the very demons acknowledged as the Holy One of God, has no need to say, "Forgive," as do sinful men. For if, in this word alone, we receive a magnificent promise, we must first of all accept the judgment upon ourselves which it carries and from which it would be very grave for us to want to hide. May God accord to you and to me the grace of recognizing that in this meditation we now stand before the central reality of every Christian life!

### ✻ I ✻

The Greek text calls for some preliminary remarks, not only in itself, but in comparison with the parallel text of the Gospel of Luke. Literally it signifies: "Cancel our debts as we ourselves cancel those of our debtors." The Jews readily used the word "debt" when they spoke of sin. Calvin underlined the importance of this word in the prayer taught by Jesus: "In calling sins debts, he signified that we owe the penalty that they call for; and that it would be impossible for us to satisfy the requirement of our penalty if we were not delivered through this remission, which is a pardon granted by his free mercy."

The corresponding petition in the Gospel of Luke must be translated: "Cancel our sins, for we ourselves cancel those of all our debtors." Less appreciative than Calvin of the value of the word "debts," Father LaGrange feels that the expression "our sins" is a



more precise term with regard to the relationship of man to God. However, it has not been thought possible to substitute the word "sins" for the word "debts" in the Matthew text. The word "trespasses" of the traditional liturgical form preserves the parallelism of the two parts of the text. The most recent Catholic translation, called that of the School of Jerusalem, is eager, however, to be faithful to the original text and writes: "Cancel our debts as we ourselves have canceled those of our debtors." It seems thus to share Calvin's concern, which was not only linguistic but also theological. Let us recognize that the liturgical text which we traditionally recite has neither the same fidelity nor the same vigor. It is well, therefore, that in meditating upon this petition we do not forget the Greek phrase and its special savor.

## ✻ II ✻

"Forgive us . . . *as we forgive*. . . ." Let us frankly admit that many Christians are brought up short by these last words! Not always for the same reasons; but sharply enough to feel, as they say them, an insurmountable uneasiness, sometimes even being tempted to drop them from their prayer. It is to these words that we will give our first attention now.

Let us hear Calvin in his catechism: "When you ask that God forgive us, *as we forgive those who have offended us*, do you mean that in pardoning other men we merit that God pardon us?" To this question the catechumen should answer:

No, for the forgiveness of God would then no longer be free, nor founded upon the atonement which was made in the death of Jesus Christ, as it must be: but it is in forgetting the injuries that we receive that we imitate his gentleness and his mercy, and that thus we let it be known that we are his children. . . . On the other hand, he lets us understand that when he will judge us we must only expect complete strictness and inexorable severity, if we are not quick to pardon and to be gracious to those who are guilty toward us.

The Reformer insists: "You understand therefore that God here disowns as his children those who cannot forget the injuries that are done to them?" "Yes," is the catechetical response, "and this is so in order that all may know that they will be measured by the same measure with which they have measured others."

Therefore, to pardon the offenses we receive creates no right to pardon for our own. God does not forgive us *because* we forgive others. But not to forgive others raises up a serious hindrance between God's pardon and ourselves. Moreover, the *as* which connects the first clause of the sentence with the second indicates no exact proportion between the two. If we want to be forgiven, we must have forgiven, and forgiven completely. We do not pray God to pardon us *in the measure that* we pardon others.

Is this not, in any case, what Christ was saying to his disciples when, having taught them the Lord's Prayer, he added, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,

neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"? And as if it were still necessary to foresee every possible misunderstanding, speaking one evening of Holy Week about the true prayer of faith, Christ made this solemn recommendation to his intimate friends: "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

There is indeed no possible way around this truth, no forgiveness from God for those who do not want to forgive others. Let us not conclude that our forgiveness is like that which we pray God to accord us. "The pardon and the remission which it is necessary for us to offer others," wrote Calvin, "is to remove voluntarily from our hearts all anger, hatred and desire of vengeance." But the pardon which we give to others becomes a sign by which it is confirmed to us "that it is as certain that he remits our sins, as we know it is that we forgive those of others, when we are aware that our hearts are entirely purged and empty of all hatred, envy, ill will, and vengeance."

Oh, it is not easy to submit on this point to the orders, however clear, of the gospel! We do not like to be invited to withdraw into ourselves and, in a secret corner of our heart, count up those of our fellows toward whom we bear resentment, against whom we wish, perhaps, to gain revenge, whom we "cordially" detest, and concerning whom we declare that, in their case anyhow, it is impossible for us to be forgiv-

ing. "Ask of me what you will, Lord, but not that!" and as for forgetting, never!

Let us once more listen to the gospel: "Lord," asked Peter of Jesus, "how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered him: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." The parable of the merciless servant, which follows, contains for every one of us personally a question from God himself. Do not fail to look it up for yourself in the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

It is really extraordinary that so many Christians find a stumbling block in this petition of the Lord's Prayer! Why complicate that which the gospel makes not easy, but so simple? Is this not a more or less camouflaged way of playing at hide-and-go-seek with God and, as Paul one day said, of "mocking" him? Is it such an enormous matter to pardon the offenses of men if we ourselves really hunger and thirst for God's pardon? In this also the clear requirement of the gospel must be our rule.

Karl Barth should be quoted here:

It is not a merit, a moral effort, or a kind of virtue to know how to forgive. Those people are most irritating who have a perpetual smile on their faces, who run after you to forgive you. . . . Let us keep a sense of humor with regard to those who offend us. Let us, without much ado, make this little gesture of pardon, of liberty for others. . . . How can I hope for something for myself if I do not grant at least that to my neighbor? . . . In doing so, I shall not

make myself worthy to receive the pardon of God; quite simply I shall validate my own hope and my prayer.

Perhaps some of you find that I have not done justice to the anguishing struggle waged in the hearts of Christians whose desire to obey Christ's commandment finds strong impulses leagued against it: the painful bitterness of tragic ordeals, often suffered less for oneself than for those one loves; and the opposition springing from feelings outraged still more by the sufferings of their country than by their own personal injuries. I know all that which, from opposite sides, one and another can argue on this point. No, indeed, it is not a small matter to pardon the injustices, the deportations, the tortures, the martyrdoms, of which our loved ones have been the victims! The victory which we must gain in our own deepest nature cannot readily be attained at one stroke; it can only be the fruit of repeated struggles in which the weapons of God, the weapons of light of which Paul speaks, are indispensable. In these very combats we catch some notion of the fact that, if it costs us dearly to forgive, it must cost much, much more for him whose love and holiness are flouted by such sinners as we are! Who then would throw the first stone at whosoever feels himself overpowered at times by bitterness or resentment? Nevertheless, Christ corners us with a pitiless alternative: Either you will pardon, or you cannot be pardoned; either you will know the joy and the peace of forgiveness, or you will interpose between God's grace and yourself an insurmountable barrier. One question dominates all the



rest—that is to say, your legitimate anger, your violent outburst of exasperation, your hatred, and even that which you think to be required by your conscience: “Do you want to be assured of God’s pardon? Do you want him to be able to hear you and to answer your plea when you say to him, ‘Our Father . . . , forgive’ ”?

### ✻ III ✻

*Forgive!* There is the word which we must now listen to if we would be able to pray it sincerely.

Is it necessary to emphasize that here in the prayer of our Lord this word does not express a human initiative but has been implanted in man’s heart by Christ? It is Jesus who permits us to say this word, and yet more, who orders us to do so. It is then from him that it draws its spiritual fullness.

Certainly the Old Testament Covenant was also acquainted with appeals to the mercy of God. There we hear the believer invoke forgiveness not only for himself but for a city or a people. Do you remember the intercession of Abraham, that gripping dialogue between the God who wants to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and the man who supplicates him to pardon them, should there be found in those cities even a handful of righteous men? Centuries pass: the descendants of the patriarch have become a people who continually murmur against God and understand but ill his promise and his deliverance. How many times we hear Moses, the great intercessor, implore the mercy of God! “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray thee, according to the greatness of thy steadfast love,

and according as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Once again the centuries pass, and we hear the prayer of Daniel. It brings before God in a poignant confession the repentance, the grief, the humiliation of his people: "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from thy commandments and ordinances. . . . We do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive."

Where are the Christians today who weep over the sins of their people and cry unto God to obtain his forgiveness?

Then there are the psalmists. There is the *Miserere*, in which David voices his repentance; the *De Profundis*, where, from the depths of the abyss, the sinner glimpses salvation:

If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee,

that thou mayest be feared.

There is the joy of the believer who, after having confessed his transgressions, sees the penalty of his sin taken away and cries out:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.

Thus from century to century the men of the Bible say and say again, each one in his way: "Thou, O Lord, art good and forgiving."

And Jesus, appearing "when the time had fully come," taught his disciples this prayer: "Our Father . . . , forgive us." With one word he validates all our calls upon the mercy of God. If the disciples of Jesus must pray in this manner, this is because they are, and they remain, sinners. It is indeed thus that their Master sees them: sinners—that is to say, transgressors of the law of God, guilty ones. The literal translation, "Cancel our debts," expresses more powerfully than the usual versions that sin makes us, with regard to God, insolvent debtors. We cannot pay our debt, and we ask to be relieved of it.

Thus Christians cannot recite the Lord's Prayer without confessing themselves to be sinners. These men who implore pardon are not strangers to the Christian faith. They are Christians. Called to say each day, "Give us this day our daily bread," they must also daily pray, "Forgive us our debts." Was not Luther faithful to the profound thought of Christ and to his realistic vision of man when he said, "*Semper justus, semper peccator*" ("Always just, always sinful")? He wished to indicate that, always justified by the grace which their faith reaches out for, the disciples of Christ are always, as long as they share this earthly existence, subject to assaults of selfishness, pride, sensuality, or untruth. Karl Barth has once written: "Our actions need only one thing, that is to be forgiven." This is indeed what the Lord's Prayer convinces us of,

when we listen attentively to the fifth petition. And it tells us also that when, by the grace of God, we do triumph over evil, we must not thereupon wish to be less intimately bound to all our brethren in the faith. We must ask God's pardon for them at the same time as for ourselves.

Do I need to say that such a notion of man is rejected by the great majority of our contemporaries? They no longer believe in sin, and they feel no need of pardon. Some believe much more in the primacy of instinct, in the right to follow their desires to their utmost consequences. If in reciting the Lord's Prayer they happen to think what they are saying when they pray, "Forgive us," they have a vague notion that it will be necessary to get right with God at the hour of their death. Until then they intend to live without letting themselves be paralyzed by a moralism which, they think, is most especially contrary to their temperament.

Besides—authors young and old repeat to us—what is this religion which humiliates man under the pretext of bringing him back to his true vocation? Man is not made to live in this atmosphere of condemnation. It is in himself, furthermore, that he must find his law and his goal. To live, he must affirm himself strong and, if necessary, be tough. To believe that forgiveness is necessary is to weaken himself and refuse his true destiny.

There are many among us who express themselves in this fashion. But this is precisely because they have

never met Christ; they have never *seen* him, as the Gospels let us see him, radiating his holiness which makes all our blemishes stand out, his love which compels us to detest our selfishness, his humility which condemns our stupid idolatry of ourselves, his truth which cuts through all our falsehoods. They have never felt themselves forced to bow down under the judgment which, in contact with Jesus, Peter pronounced against himself: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But discourses on sin will never make an appeal to the mercy of God rise from the heart of a man. Only the revelation of his love, his patience, his generosity, convicts us of sin and leads us to pray in repentance and in faith: "Our Father . . . , forgive us our debts."

Yet we pray also in joy! For if the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer implies the judgment which Christ makes upon his own disciples, and which he wants to lead them to make upon themselves, it contains also the magnificent promise that God wants to pardon us. How would Jesus have ordained such a prayer to poor, sinful man, if he had not been certain that the granting of these petitions is promised to faith! We can be tempted, of course, to fall asleep because of this promise, persuading ourselves that God—"the good Lord" comfortably counted on by some Christians—is obliged, by his very love, to be gracious toward whoever calls upon him, even though it be only with our lips. After all, what does that cost him? Nothing but the gift, the passion, and the death of his only Son! One's heart becomes hardened when the "forgive us our debts"



becomes a vain repetition. But the Christian who takes the Lord's Prayer seriously, who listens to it as he prays it, receives with gladness the assurance which Christ gives him in the prayer itself: God forgives those who repent and who believe.

But is it necessary to repeat to him that we desire his pardon? Yes, indeed yes! God knows better than we that we cannot do without his forgiveness, but *we* must learn this from him. We must get acquainted with ourselves such as we are before him, judge ourselves as he judges us, condemn ourselves as he condemns us. "Clear thou me from hidden faults," prayed the psalmist. In asking forgiveness we acquire that inner transparency which allows the light of the divine holiness to illuminate our most obscure recesses. God knows better than we that his pardon will be the strength and the joy of our life, but *we* have to discover it and to believe it. We show God our desire, our expectation, our loyalty, our faith in his promise, by repeating to him each day: "Forgive us."

#### ✻ IV ✻

Here the splendor of the gospel revelation and, in its deepest significance, of Christian truth bursts forth. At the moment when Jesus permits and enjoins his disciples to ask God forgiveness for their sins, God has already answered, God has already pardoned. In Jesus Christ, God answers the prayer given to the Church by Jesus Christ. Christ is the answer given in advance to the "forgive us" of the faithful. He is the Father's pardon, announced, declared, proclaimed, in the gift

of the Son, but also in the pardon accorded through the Son.

"Your sins are forgiven," said Jesus to the paralytic who lay before him on his pallet. "The Son of man," he adds, "has authority on earth to forgive sins." To the sinful woman who stands at his feet and sprinkles them with her tears, he declares: "Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

"Who is this, who even forgives sins?" wondered, on hearing his words, the guests of Simon the Pharisee. Exactly, there is the question. Neither the paralytic nor the sinful woman had yet formulated the least prayer. But Jesus knows that forgiveness must enter their lives in order that they might recognize themselves sinners before God and that, in repentance, they might be born to a new life. Because he knows that honest folk like his disciples have just as much need of forgiveness as prostitutes and other people of evil habits, he commands them to pray, "Forgive us," in order that their life might open to the response which God has given him the mission of declaring to them.

I do not need to repeat here that Jesus Christ is the response of God to the prayer of sinners who repent in faith. Yet how can I fail to point out that since the beginnings of the Church the forgiveness of sins has been indissolubly linked, for every Christian soul, with the cross of Golgotha? The sacrifice of Christ on Calvary has, from the very first day, shown itself to be, in the light of Easter, the definitive response to the petition of sinners who, praying the Lord's Prayer, hear in it at one and the same time the condemnation

of their sins and the promise of their pardon. Christ "was put to death for our trespasses," wrote Paul to the Romans. He gave his life in accepting to being "made sin" for us. The *debt* for which, when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask cancellation because it is impossible for us to discharge it, he wanted to pay in our place. By the same stroke he gave the perfect revelation of the love of God, who, "because he first loved us," "sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins," in order that "we might live through him." Oh! I know how we draw back before these affirmations which are at the center of the apostolic testimony, and sometimes even reject them. At the foot of the cross the Church contemplates a mystery of justice and of mercy, of holiness and of grace, a mystery whose immensity no human word can circumscribe or reduce; the Church prays, "Forgive," and her faithful members know in faith that they are forgiven.

Karl Barth notes:

In this fifth petition we confess our bankruptcy, and if someone does not want to do so, he must renounce asking forgiveness of God. It is necessary for us to recognize that our own cause is lost. If we recognize it, it becomes for us a victorious cause, for it is then in the hand of him who has pardoned and who pardons still.

The Church of Christ lives by this reality of forgiveness ever since her Lord was raised up to glory. I do not pretend, certainly, that all her members nourish their spiritual life from this pardon. But let

us not cast stones at others, and let us be sincere with regard to ourselves. Have we not often a secret accord with certain forms of sin, at first simply not giving them this name, then leaving them out of the reckoning of what we have to repent of? The perverse pleasure that we feel in hearing evil said of others and in repeating it; our lusts and our jealousies, which are so carefully dissimulated; our polite or other lies; our avarice, which we choose to think of as the spirit of frugality—are all these sin? Must we really think of these minute weaknesses or adaptations to the prejudices of the world when we pray, “Forgive us our debts”? Yes, we must think of them, for our Christian life, of which our morality is only one aspect—but how terribly important an aspect!—is eroded from within by this lack of sincerity vis-à-vis God and ourselves, which takes up abode in our inner parts like a worm in fruit.

It is not a question of falling into the opposite excess, of living with an obsession regarding the sins of which one has rendered himself or may render himself guilty, of always wondering if one has not committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, which consists precisely in not believing in sin. Christians who are sinking into the quicksands of anguish over their sins, who doubt that they will ever receive pardon, who do not receive with faith the most solemn declarations of God that he will “tread our iniquities under foot” and “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea,” and that though our sins “are like scarlet,” he will make them “as white as snow,” should be led, by the teaching and the spirit-



ual pedagogy of the Church, to accept with a humble and confident heart the promises of Jesus Christ. Are there those among you who do not know the joy of forgiveness? How I should like that you might, with Karl Barth, say to God:

Our mistakes are henceforth thy affair, not ours. Thou dost prohibit us from looking backward, from feeling ourselves overwhelmed and, as it were, chained by our past, by what we are and do today and even by what we will be and will do tomorrow. . . . Thou hast severed us from this past. In Jesus Christ thou hast made of me a new creature!

The Church has a great and delicate mission to fulfill among these scrupulous or hesitant souls who ceaselessly put in question for themselves but also for others the mercy of God. She must warn them that they risk, as Paul said, making vain the cross of Christ.

The *we* of the prayer must once again receive our attention. It is in the communion of all Christians that we make this appeal to God for forgiveness, forgiveness for them as for ourselves. It is in the Church, with the Church, I never grow weary of repeating, that we pray the prayer of the universal Church. And it is in her that the assurance of pardon, of which she is among us the herald and the witness, is declared to our faith.

Calvin has expressed himself on this point with an extraordinary clarity and strength.

The Lord has not promised his mercy except in the communion of the Saints. . . . For this reason it is necessary



to hold the point as settled that, through the clemency of God, by means of the merit of Jesus Christ, and by the sanctification of his Spirit, the remission of our sins has been granted, and is granted to us daily, in that we are united to the body of the Church.

It is "through the ministry of the Church" that "in the communion of Saints our sins are continually remitted . . . just as much our corporate as our private sins, according to our needs." Ministers "are ordained of God as witnesses to assure our consciences of the remission of sins: this is so much so that it is said that they forgive sins and unloose souls."

Must it be recalled that in his first Geneva liturgy Calvin prescribed to the officiant that, after the confession of sins, there should be the "absolution"? Melancthon, the faithful companion of Luther, proceeded in the same sense when he wrote in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*: "Everyone knows that we Protestants hold in such honor the benefit of absolution . . . that it has happened that many anguished consciences have been consoled thanks to our teaching on this subject." Will you say that the Reformers conserved from their time in the Roman church elements of the Catholic tradition which our churches, by reason of fidelity to the gospel, must reject without any hesitation? But what shall we do then, we who declare that we recognize the sovereign authority of Holy Scriptures, with the word said by Christ to his apostles and through them to the Church: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven"? In truth, when the

Church assembles to worship God and ask of him, in confessing her sins, the pardon which, as we have seen, the Lord's Prayer implicitly promises, it is not for her "a little consolation," we would say with Calvin, "to have there present the ambassador of Jesus Christ who has been commissioned to absolve, and who announces to the Church that he absolves her in the name of his Master and by his authority, in keeping with the trust which has been laid upon him."

A saying of Luther will serve as conclusion to this meditation on the prayer "Forgive us our debts."

"By this prayer," he has written, "God wants to break our pride and maintain us in humility. . . . Let no one imagine himself able to reach during this earthly life the point where he will no longer have need of forgiveness. If God did not ceaselessly pardon, we should be lost."

Thanks be to him who lets us live in the joy and in the power of his pardon, and thus makes possible that we say to him, as Christ commanded us to do at the close of the Lord's Prayer: "Deliver us from evil."

*Amen.*

## CHAPTER SIX

# *And Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us from Evil*

MATTHEW 6:13

WHAT IS the most exact translation of the Greek text of this last petition of the Lord's Prayer? Is it that which is found in the official liturgy of the Reformed Church of France? Or another? Or, indeed, must we say that we may freely choose among several translations which are equally faithful? Although I am far from desiring to give a lesson in exegesis, we cannot escape these questions. Moreover, there are many of you who ask yourselves such questions because you have been disconcerted by the diversity of versions used in public worship or in the editions of the Bible which you have at hand.

"Lead us not into temptation" (*Ne nous induis pas en tentation*), translates the Second Version, widely used in French-speaking countries. The same form is

in the first editions of the Synodal Version, which enjoys such a great authority in our churches in France; but in the seventh edition, which appeared recently, we observe, not without surprise, that this text is translated: "Abandon us not to temptation" (*Ne nous abandonne pas à la tentation*), and that a footnote proposes as a variant reading: "Put us not to the test" (*Ne nous mets pas à l'épreuve*). The word *lead* has disappeared. Stapfer keeps the traditional version, but suggests in a note: "Spare us the trial (*Epargne-nous l'épreuve*). In the Centenary Bible, where the four Gospels have been translated by Dean Maurice Goguel, one reads: "Subject us not to temptation" (*Ne nous soumet pas à la tentation*); and these same words are found in the most recent Catholic translation, published under the direction of the Biblical School of Jerusalem. In a very similar rendering the liturgy of Geneva says: "Expose us not to temptation" (*Ne nous expose pas à la tentation*).

How are we to explain these divergences issuing from the pens of men whose science and whose conscience are beyond question?

The causes of these differences are multiple. Let us begin with the word *temptation*. It is the translation of the Greek term *peirasmos*, unknown, it seems, outside Holy Writ and patristic literature. The Bailly dictionary translates it by the words "attempt, test, experiment, temptation" and refers the reader to the verb *peiradsô*, from which it is derived. For this verb the dictionary gives: "to attempt, to try, that is to say, make the test or the experiment of . . . ; in a bad

sense: to tempt, to seek to seduce or to corrupt; to try, in speaking of a sickness."

You see then that an unavoidable choice is forced upon the most scrupulous translators: a *temptation* and a *trial* are very different things in the ordinary use of our language, in spite of the internal relations of one with the other. We should never think of saying of a man who succumbs to every temptation that he succumbs to every trial. We should not say of a friend cruelly tried in his flesh that he is cruelly tempted.

How to choose? It is here that what we call the exegetical sense intervenes, and the patient study of the context, the parallels, other biblical passages where the same word is employed. We find in this case, however, a similar diversity. I shall only cite verse 12 of chapter 1 of the Epistle of James: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation," reads one translation, "for, after being put to the test, he shall receive the crown of life" (*Heureux celui qui endure la tentation, car, après avoir été mis à l'épreuve, il recevra la couronne de vie*). "Blessed is the man who patiently bears testing . . .," reads another (*Heureux l'homme qui supporte patiemment l'épreuve*). Let us recognize that there is here a real difficulty, all the larger by reason of our ignorance of the Aramaic word which Jesus used when he taught the Lord's Prayer to his disciples. Let us note that these philological observations suffice to forbid certain conceptions, which are sometimes urged upon us, of the *literal* inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.



A difficulty of another sort confronts us in the translation "Lead us not." It is not the dictionary which here compels us to make a choice. The Greek word does in fact signify: "Carry into, lead, embark; introduce, carry away," but it never, never, has the sense of *to abandon*: "Abandon us not." Whence comes then this term in the most recent French version? Would it not be from the conviction, theological rather than philological, that James's letter enunciates a truth of the faith when, soon after the words which I cited above, we read: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one."

But here we enter already into the very substance of our text. Let us say for the moment that the Greek language seems to compel the translation "Lead us not into temptation."

The second clause of the petition also involves a choice. Shall we say, "Deliver us from evil," or, as preferred by Stapfer, the Centenary Bible, and the Jerusalem Bible: "from the Evil One" (*du Malin*)? Is the Greek word used the masculine *ponéros* (the Evil One, the Wicked One, or the Demon)? Or is it rather the neuter *ponéron* (evil)? The construction of the sentence raises the question: to each translator, to each preacher, the necessity of deciding for himself. The new liturgy of the Reformed Church of France, breaking with a long tradition, welcomes the translation "Deliver us from the Evil One." This is the form of the text which we shall use in this meditation.

## ✻ II ✻

Here we are, then, before this petition, so often recited without being profoundly thought: "Lead us not into temptation." Can other passages of Holy Writ be compared to this one? Will the interpretation which the Reformers give to the Lord's Prayer elucidate our meditation?

Do you remember the opening pages of the book of Job?

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, "Whence have you come?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"

Then Satan, after having enumerated all the benedictions which God has poured out upon Job, adds:

"But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand."

You know what immense ordeals were not long in overwhelming the patriarch. But through these trials did not also terrible temptations come to assail him,

temptations of bitterness, of revolt, of despair, and the most terrible of all, the temptation of unbelief? Would not Job have been true to the facts in praying, "Put me not to the test," but equally well, "Lead me not into temptation"?

Let us open the first Gospel and reread the first verse of its fourth chapter: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Then follows the narrative of the triple temptation of the Savior. They are certainly temptations, but temptations through which Christ's will to be totally obedient to his messianic vocation is put to the test, is *tried*. After having been on hand to witness this great combat against the prince of darkness, we understand why the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says of Jesus Christ: "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted." If, therefore, Christ has put upon the lips of his disciples these words which let us glimpse a background of mystery, "Lead us not into temptation," are we not right in daring to say that through his personal experience he had sounded their uttermost depths?

Let us listen to the apostle Paul, writing to the Christians at Corinth: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Temptation? or trial, as in other translations? Here again the temptation, from wherever it comes, seems a putting

to the test; and the trial, whatever its source, seems to carry with it possibilities of temptation. You have heard the solemn admonition of James: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." Some translators think that these words are decisive, compelling the translation of this petition of the Lord's Prayer as either "Abandon us not to temptation" or "Put us not to the test."

Calvin never thought of modifying the traditional translation, which is in conformity with the Latin version which he had so often recited: "*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem.*" By this prayer, he taught in his catechism, we ask "that God not allow us to succumb to evil and that he not permit that we be vanquished by the demon." In truth he seems to approve in advance those who feel themselves irresistibly driven to substitute the word *abandon* for the word *lead*. However, he sees clearly the difficulty, and he cannot forget the words of the Epistle of James, and he has the catechumen asked: "Why do you ask God that he not lead us into evil, for to do that is the proper function of the demon?" And he has the catechumen answer that God not only abandons those whom he wants to punish, taking away from them his grace, but that "he delivers them to the devil to be subject to his tyranny." This is a fearful warning, founded upon numerous texts of the biblical revelation. We do not like to listen to it, and our protest is immediately raised. Perhaps we



would do better to meditate upon it, thinking of our own denials, our transgressions, our unbelief. Will the patience of God toward us have no end?

Commenting upon our text, Luther notes:

It may happen that he who is standing today falls tomorrow. Not to lead us into temptation is not to suppress temptation but to give us strength to resist it. . . . It is one thing to be tried by temptations, another thing to consent and give in to them. . . . No doubt I am at this moment chaste, patient, affable, firm in the faith; but this is precisely the moment when the devil is going to launch into my heart one of those shafts which it is almost impossible to resist. . . . For the enemy of our soul never wearies or tires.

Karl Barth, whose study is here particularly gripping, constrains us to consider in what tragic alternative we find ourselves. Of little importance in his eyes are "the minor temptations, the sins which do not lead to death, the temporary temptations which God sends us every day . . . because they are necessary for us." But here, at this point in the Lord's Prayer, it is a question of something entirely different! It is a question of "the great temptation, the eschatological temptation . . . which is the work of the Evil One." The question is of the infinite menace of nothingness which opposes itself to God himself. This evil is not one of the things which God wanted and created. It makes its appearance in "the illegitimate, incomprehensible, and inexplicable domination of him whom the Scriptures call the Devil. . . . There where God is absent, where



he is not the master, it is the other who dominates. There is no other alternative."

I have spoken of mystery. Do we not have the impression of having come up hard against it in these words, even as in the narrative of the temptations of Jesus? Is it not before this alternative that Christ found himself: either God is the master, or it is the *other* who dominates? How should his disciples then escape confronting the same alternative? "A disciple is not above his teacher," said Christ. If he himself was tempted in all things, and not only on the morrow of his baptism when, armed with the Word of God, he triumphed over the Adversary, can his disciples claim not to be tempted? "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation," Jesus recommended to them at Gethsemane. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Temptation which tries the strength of resistance of the spirit, of the heart, or of the flesh? Testing which opens the door to the assault of diabolical temptations? In very truth we understand that one and the same word designates in the Bible these two realities, at first sight so different, in fact so tragically conjoined in our sinful human lives. When an ordeal has struck you, have you never been tempted to doubt God? Although you declare yourself Christian, have you never glimpsed the possibility of total negation? And was this not the case because you were thrown into an abyss of distress from which it seemed to you that God could have—you thought *ought* to have—preserved you? You cried out to him, however, in the midst of

your murmurings and, perhaps, of your inner revolts. You brought to him your suffering and its frightful suggestions. Impossible that he permit this, you said to yourself, that he not cast aside this threat, that he leave you exposed to the assaults of the demon! You have then prayed: "Our Father . . . , lead us not into temptation."

### ❧ III ❧

"But deliver us from the Evil One!" The Greek verb is stronger than it appears in our translation; "wrest us" would better give its meaning.

Simone Weil, whose letters and essays published after her death have had an extraordinary reception, notes with regard to this prayer: "The word 'Father' began the prayer, and the word 'evil' terminates it. We must go from confidence to fear. Only confidence gives us enough strength so that fear will not be for us an occasion of failing." For his part, Karl Barth notes that the Lord's Prayer terminates on a *de profundis*: "If our prayer did not terminate with this *de profundis*, it would not correspond to that which Jesus Christ has taught us."

Yes, indeed, if Christ commands us to let "our Father" hear this appeal for deliverance which runs through the whole Bible, and which gives to certain psalms their overpowering accents, it is assuredly to make us aware of what is the most concrete thing in our existence: this grip of Satan over our total life, this servitude into which we are always in danger of falling anew, if indeed we have already been freed

from it. It is necessary that we have no delusions about ourselves and that we dare to look directly at that which is too often hidden behind the façade of good people, and even of very pious Christians, which we like to hold before the Church and the world. Ah! this secret slavery, for which we tremble before God in the hours when we consent to be sincere with regard to ourselves—it is necessary that we feel, that we hate, its chains, whose great weight becomes clear to us when we persevere in praying: “Deliver us from the Evil One!”

Yet it is not only a *de profundis* which resounds in the closing words of the Lord’s Prayer; it is also a magnificent promise of victory. The Father who is revealed through Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, is the God of deliverances. The psalmists had already hymned this theme, and with what grateful joy! But all their anticipations, all their hopes, all their faith, find their fulfillment in the “glorious liberty of the children of God,” which Paul characterizes in these words: “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God.”

From what, therefore, do we ask to be delivered?

Not from a kind of impersonal principle which we name evil because it leads us to oppose the will of God. Not simply from sin which infects our feeling, our thought, our will, our action, perverting our desire, staining our heart, and darkening our soul. But from the yoke which weighs upon us because of the cursed action of him whom the Bible sometimes names Satan, sometimes the Devil, sometimes the prince of

this world. For the men of the Bible, there is a great Adversary, whose demoniac will reveals its power over our poor human wills. It is he whom Jesus met in the hour of his temptations. It is of him that Peter, in his first letter, writes that he "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour." The Apostle called him the Devil. I would say with Karl Barth:

The thought is far from me to preach the Devil to you. One cannot preach him and I have in no wise the intention of causing you anguish. But there is here, however, a reality which we modern Christians pass over too lightly. There exists a superior, inevitable enemy, whom we cannot resist if God does not come to our aid. . . . It is necessary to know that the Devil exists, but then to hasten to go away from him.

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," Christ one day said to his disciples. He knew himself to be, therefore, conqueror of Satan; he knew that, through him, the power of Satan had been stricken unto death. We receive in faith the certitude of this victory. We can pray, "Deliver us from the Evil One," with confident hope only because Christ has won this victory for us. And we believe that it can and must ring out in our lives, making us also conquerors.

"Deliver us," we say to God. Is not this to recognize that we cannot deliver ourselves, that our will is powerless to conquer our liberty precisely because it is enslaved? "I hold out my arms toward my Liberator," exclaimed Pascal. He knew that neither his intelligence nor his science nor his moral force could, outside the



grace of God, liberate him from his inner enslavement. Ah! let us beware of allowing the contrary to be believed, of promising to men who are impure, dishonest, selfish, idolators of themselves, that to become new men it will be sufficient for them to want to. Satan, who "disguises himself as an angel of light," is more intelligent, more powerful, more persevering, more *malign*, than we. God alone has dominion over him, and if God allows him still to make ravages, he knows how to contain Satan within the bounds where his own divine plan of love for men slowly unfolds. Let us then not grow weary of asking him for our ever more complete emancipation, repeating to him: "Deliver us from the Evil One."

#### ✻ IV ✻

Yes, we pray in this manner. But do we perceive where our prayer is leading us? When this last petition, which so often wears the accents of supplication, is presented, it obliges those who bring it before God and who want to be of an upright heart to ask themselves if they really desire to be delivered, if they really want to become free with the freedom of children of God.

Doubtless you have not forgotten what we have discovered in the first phrases of the Lord's Prayer. We were thinking of bringing to God fervent wishes for the triumph of his cause. But these wishes came back upon us ourselves in the form of requirements addressed by God to us. It is the same here in this closing petition. It is not we who can deliver ourselves



from the Evil One; God alone accords us deliverance. But is this a reason for waiting, without doing anything, for him to come to intervene in our lives? Have we only to submit our cause to him without bearing him witness through our obedience, through the combat of our faith, through our persevering effort to accomplish the good works "which God has prepared beforehand, that we might accomplish them" by our labors of love in the Church and in the service of humanity? Must we not show that we take seriously our prayer, that we are ready to sign it by our renunciations, our sacrifices, our dying to ourselves?

When we pray God to deliver us from the Evil One and from all the traces of his activity in our lives, are we always certain to give our consent in advance to his breaking every tie which binds us to this or that form of sin? Do you discern the effort of total sincerity which our request requires of us if we do not want God to reject it as a vain repetition or, still worse, as a lie?

If it is true that each church member, praying the Lord's Prayer, is called to discover in this last petition an appeal for a personal decision to obey the will of God revealed in his Word, how should it not be just as true for the Church as a whole, or in the life of each one of its parishes? "Deliver us from the Evil One," repeat the members of a Christian fellowship, assembled in their sanctuary to worship God. What can this mean other than that they ask for the Church, as well as for each disciple of Christ, the grace of this liberty? Yes, the Church must desire to receive the liberty of saying *no* to her adversary, to all the de-

moniac forces which exercise their pressure upon her; she must, therefore, by the light of the prayer which her Lord has commanded her to pray, look about courageously to see if the Evil One does not have a hold upon the Church herself through some complacency which she manifests with regard to that which is not the truth, the holiness, or the love of her Lord, by some seeking after her own prestige or her human glory. The freedom of the Church is not self-evident in a world of prejudices, compromises, conformity. You understand that I do not mean her external liberty, either freely given or haggled over by the state, but her liberty to be under all circumstances that which her Lord Jesus Christ wants her to be and to bear him the witness which she owes him, even if it be in receiving the grace of suffering for him.

Once again, one last time, we may say: Even before we addressed our prayer to God, it was answered, for its answer is in the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan. Deliverance is assured us because the cross of Calvary, symbol of ignominy, proclaims the triumph of the love which is willing to die in order to live again by giving life. Love—and the love of God always foremost—awakens, makes grow, strengthens, our faith in him who, in giving us life, gives us liberty.

“For freedom Christ has set us free,” wrote Paul. Like the liberty of the Church, the liberty of the Christian is a grace, for it is and subsists only where the Spirit of the Lord is present. Luther demonstrated, in pages that are decisive, that we are free with re-

gard to Satan, the world, men, and things, when in faith we are willing to be totally dependent upon God. Here we see how the end of the Lord's Prayer is connected with its beginning. We can pray, "Deliver us from the Evil One," only because we know that Jesus Christ is the answer of God to our prayer that his name be hallowed, that his kingdom come, that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. But now we can ask even this, and we know that in Jesus Christ we are already answered.

No! We are neither dreamers nor fools when we speak in this fashion. We recall, to be sure, that we are not angels, and we know that we have not attained saintliness. The thought of our stained lives makes us cruelly suffer. The rebounds of the old man, who will not yet consent to die, the assaults of pride and selfishness, and our denials and our cowardices and our capitulations make us doubt sometimes the reality of our deliverance. Ah! my brothers, let us take care not to yield to the mortal temptation of unbelief. Let us accept with humility yet with faith all the demands and all the promises of the Lord's Prayer. Let it uncover before our eyes the goal toward which, to speak like Paul, we must march together. If Christ has laid his hand upon us in order that we might be his disciples, if he has given us the prayer which we have just meditated upon together at great length, it is in order that we might be his throughout time and for eternity. But it is also in order that, hallowing the name of God in our Christian life, working for his kingdom, obeying as loyal sons his will, we should

advance toward the day when God will complete what he has begun in us. This will be the day of Jesus Christ, the day of his glorious accession, the day when beyond death and in the joy of the resurrection, we shall see that the prayer of the Church Universal is answered for eternity.



Perhaps you would feel a certain astonishment if I should pass over in silence the doxology which terminates, at least in our Protestant churches, the recitation of the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever." It is not found in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel; it is therefore not authentic, in the sense that it is not an integral part of the Lord's Prayer. This is why our Catholic brothers do not recite it. It belongs, however, to the liturgical practice of the very first centuries of the history of the Church. No doubt it was sung by the faithful in response to the prayer said by the officiant. It proclaims that kingship, power, and glory belong not to the Evil One, but to God our Father. But it bears also upon the whole prayer and is intended to recall to Christians that it is their duty to pray this prayer, for only God, in his fatherly love, can fulfill the expectation of their faith.

Finally we say, "*Amen*," which is to say, "So be it." Let us for a last time quote Karl Barth: "The Lord's Prayer is not a haphazard enterprise, a voyage in the blue. It must end as it began, with conviction: yes, may these things be!"



The moment has come for us to bid farewell to our meditations on the Lord's Prayer. But why should we bid farewell to the prayer itself? Must it not, now more than ever, be a part of our very lives? A great Christian of the last century, who was a herald of the life of prayer, said: "In general, the Lord's Prayer suffices for me." I do not ask you to pray only the Lord's Prayer, but I believe that if you will pray it each day, you will see your Christian life filled with great spiritual riches. The Christians of the second century knew this well, and they recited it three times each day. Simone Weil, to whom we listened a while ago, one day wrote:

I have accepted as my sole spiritual discipline to recite the Lord's Prayer once each morning with absolute attention. If during the recitation my attention is distracted or relaxes . . . , I begin again until I have obtained an absolutely pure state of attention. . . . The virtue of this practice is extraordinary and surprises me each time, for although I experience it every day, each time it surpasses my expectation.

What someone who did not wish to call herself Christian thus accomplished daily, do we not want to try? What a gracious gift, then, these meditations will have brought us!

As we close our careful study of the Lord's Prayer, let us not deny ourselves the joy of praying it together. Let each in his solitude, let all who gather together in Christian congregations, offer with one voice to our God the prayer of the Church Universal:



Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
    On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our debts,  
    As we forgive our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation,  
    But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power  
    and the glory, forever!

*Amen.*

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48	26	Hebrews 10:10
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## III. Thy Kingdom Come

58	19	Matthew 12:28
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58	22	Luke 17:21
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58	23	John 4:34
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59	1	Luke 10:18
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59	5	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 36
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59	28	<i>Ibid.</i> , p. 40
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60	5	Matthew 24:36
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60	26	Matthew 24:14
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61	3	I Corinthians 15:28
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61	25	Romans 10:14-15
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64	29	Matthew 5:21-22
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65	2	John 13:34; 15:12
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67	4	Matthew 13:38
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#### IV. Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

70	2	Hébert Roux, <i>L'Evangile du Royaume</i> , p. 81
70	15	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 42
71	20	<i>Institution Chrétienne</i> , III, xx, 44
71	28	Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4
72	2	John 6:35, 48, 51
73	10	Barth, <i>op. cit.</i> , p. 44
73	16	Matthew 7:7
73	17	Matthew 7:11
73	26	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 45
77	28	Isaiah 58:7
78	6	Genesis 4:9
82	13	Matthew 5:45
82	17	Romans 12:20
85	15	John 15:5
25	28	Matthew 6:31-33

#### V. And Forgive Us Our Debts

87	12	Luke 11:1-4
88	19	<i>Institution Chrétienne</i> , III, xx, 45 (edition of 1560)
89	24	<i>Catéchisme de Calvin, in loco</i>
90	29	Matthew 6:14-15
91	6	Mark 11:25
91	13	<i>Institution Chrétienne</i> , III, xx, 45
92	3	Matthew 18:21-22
92	23	<i>Op. cit.</i> , pp. 50-51
94	28	Numbers 14:19
95	6	Daniel 9:5, 18-19
95	15	Psalms 51
95	16	Psalms 130:3-4
95	26	Psalms 32:1
96	2	Psalms 86:5
96	4	Galatians 4:4
98	9	Luke 5:8
99	12	Psalms 19:12
100	3	Mark 2:5, 10
100	7	Luke 7:48, 50
100	9	Luke 7:49
101	2	Romans 4:25

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101	3	II Corinthians 5:21
101	8	I John 4:19
101	9	I John 4:10
101	10	I John 4:9
101	20	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 53
102	28	Micah 7:19; Isaiah 1:18
103	6	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 52
103	28	<i>Institution Chrétienne</i> , IV, i, 21
104	6	<i>Ibid.</i>
104	18	P. 174
104	29	John 20:23
105	4	<i>Op. cit.</i>
105	12	Luther, <i>Grand Catéchisme</i> , in <i>Livres Symboliques</i> , I, 187

## VI. And Lead Us Not into Temptation

109	11	James 1:13
110	9	Job 1:6-12
111	7	Matthew 4:1
111	16	Hebrews 2:18
111	25	I Corinthians 10:13
112	3	James 1:13-14
112	14	<i>Le Catéchisme</i> (Edition Je Sers), p. 99
112	16	<i>Ibid.</i> , p. 101
113	5	<i>Les Livres Symboliques</i> , II (Edition Je Sers), 191
113	27	<i>Op. cit.</i> , pp. 54-55
114	14	Matthew 26:41
115	13	<i>L'Attente de Dieu</i> , p. 221
115	19	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 56
116	19	Romans 8:21
116	20	Romans 6:22
117	5	I Peter 5:8
117	8	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 55
117	16	Luke 10:18
118	6	II Corinthians 11:14
119	7	Ephesians 2:10 (from a French translation)
120	27	Galatians 5:1
122	26	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 59
123	6	Saying of Christophe Dieterlen to T. Fallot
123	13	<i>Op. cit.</i> , p. 77